Foundation for Change:

Focusing on Iowa High Schools

State of Iowa
Department of Education
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State Board of Education

Acknowledgements

FOREWARD

High schools have been the topic of conversation amongst Iowans for several years. Business and industry, parents, and other community members have increasingly expressed concern over Iowa's economy and the preparation of her future work force. In July 2001 the State Board of Education committed itself and the Department of Education to the serious study of Iowa high schools with a goal of developing specific recommendations.

The Department of Education provided the leadership for a thorough literature review, conversations with Iowans across the state and the review of a sampling of promising practices currently in Iowa high schools as they aligned with the literature review. Because the topic of high schools is of concern to many stakeholders throughout the state, it was easy to bring together a high quality group of individuals to form the Leadership Team. Working with the Department, this team committed many hours to the study and development of specific recommendations regarding the direction for high school change.

This report is structured around five critical characteristics for effective high schools that are based in the literature review and supported by the community conversations and the review of promising practices. The recommendations are solidly grounded in twenty years of the best research available concerning high schools. The recommendations are framed around the passion and commitment of many Iowans and the businesses, associations, and organizations they represent to increase the opportunities for our youth and the economic viability of this state.
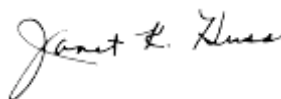
It is our hope that this document (report) will be a springboard for change, will be used as a foundation for next steps for changing Iowa high schools, and to guide the state's continued efforts with education reform PK-16. The individuals involved in the study, research, and development of this report are committed to making these recommendations become reality.

Thank you for the opportunity to work on this important issue. We believe that you will find it informative, compelling, inspiring, and a call to action.

Please join us in making Iowa's future brighter for all citizens.

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Executive Summary

A Message from the Cross-Bureau and Leadership Teams:

"Our Beliefs About Changing Iowa's High Schools"

Students have asked us to tell you to "stop the cookie cutter approach," "engage students in the change," and "don't be afraid to take risks!" Change is possible – and risk taking is necessary if we are seriously committed to assuring the best future possible for all Iowa's youth. We acknowledge that this will require new approaches, not just "tinkering around the edges," and the utilization of resources in new and innovative ways. Yet, we know that our work here has been influenced by our involvement and understanding of the system currently in place. That said, many of the recommendations are intended to both deal with the existing system and the transformation to one that will assure that each student will have the ability to make good choices, apply their skills and knowledge, and the desire necessary to be a healthy and productive citizen. Know that we are each committed to the work necessary to assure that every child will achieve to his or her highest potential…no matter what. We want to applaud in advance all the leaders in Iowa at the state, regional and community levels who also commit to this effort to focus on and change Iowa's high schools.

Collecting Public Opinion

In April 2000, the Iowa Department of Education sponsored a "Reinventing High Schools" Conference designed to collect public opinion regarding the need for Iowa High Schools to change. At the end of two days of discussion and consensus building, the overwhelming message was "YES they do!" Governor Vilsack suggested to the group that Iowa cannot afford high schools to be slow or resistant to change when the world around us is changing at an unprecedented rate. He added that the high school experience must not be limited to the traditional model for learning in the school building, but must access and engage the resources and support of the community. The conference concluded with many suggestions for next steps, one of which was the additional review of Iowa high schools.

The State Board of Education determined a priority should be placed on high schools and asked the State Department of Education to begin a study that would include a review of the literature on high school reform, conversations with the wider community of Iowans regarding the current reality in Iowa high schools, the need for change, and specific thoughts about what that might look like. And finally, the study should include a review of promising practices in Iowa High Schools. As a result, DE staff organized two teams to conduct this work. One team, representing a cross section of internal DE staff, was committed to coordinating and managing the study, conducting the research, organizing data collection, and communicating progress. The second team, or the Leadership Team, consisted of

representatives from business, higher education, lab schools, alternative education, school boards and associations, educator and administrator associations, rural and urban schools, parent organizations, and area education agencies. This highly committed Leadership team was a model of effectiveness: deeply committed to the study of high schools, engaging in the thorough review of all findings, and the challenging and testing of collected research against the realities of their work and areas of expertise. This report, *A Foundation for Change: Focusing on Iowa High Schools*, represents the quality work of these teams.

> *"Iowa's Promise to Students in Iowa High Schools: Each student will be prepared to achieve his/her maximum potential in order to fully participate in a democratic society"*
>
> *- Focus on High Schools Leadership Team*

A Foundation for Change: Focusing on Iowa High Schools is a work product resulting from careful thinking, supported by a research based framework, which leads to specific recommendations for changing Iowa High Schools. The five characteristics identified by this report as critical elements for effective high schools are also supported by the work completed by 2001 Iowa Education Roundtable chaired by Nolan Gentry, the 2010 Report, the "Strategic Plan for Educational Excellence in the 21st Century", the "Reinventing High Schools Report" completed by the Iowa Urban Education Network, the *Iowa Teacher Quality Initiative*, and most recently the Governor's initiative, *Iowa Learns*.

"*A Foundation for Change: Focusing on Iowa High Schools*" also resonates with the national thinking about changing education including: *High Schools of the Millennium* (American Youth Policy Forum, 2001); All *Over the Map: State Policies to Improve High School* (National Alliance on the American High School, 2002*)*; *Every Child a Graduate* (Alliance for Excellence in Education, 2001); *The Lost Opportunity of Senior Year: Finding a Better Way* (National Commission on the High School Senior Year); and *First Things First: A Framework for Successful School Reform* (Kauffman Foundation and The Institute for Research and Reform in Education, 2001).

A Foundation for Change: Focusing on Iowa High Schools cannot be viewed as a program that can magically be dropped into a high school and result in change. Nor does it suggest that every high school adopt it as "one size fits all" blueprint. Rather, this report recommends that each school be recognized for its unique community, student body, and staff. The five characteristics for effective high schools should be viewed first as a tool for self-assessment, gap identification and a guide for goal setting and aligning resources for change. It calls for the engagement of entire communities including all levels of education (elementary through post-secondary), families, community organizations and associations, school staff, and businesses. In this way, the education of each student and their successful transition to a productive citizen in Iowa becomes the investment and responsibility of each member of the community and not left to rest at the door of the high school.

While there is agreement among the teams that developed this report that many of the five characteristics highlighted in this report are consistent with other high school change efforts, the "guarantee" to changing Iowa High Schools comes from a commitment to implementing all five characteristics as a unit and not as separate independent efforts in isolation of others in the

school building, district and the community. This report recommends that there are multiple teachers and caring adults and resources available to enhance the learning experience of each student, and that the community be drawn on to assist in the development and implementation of this learning experience. Additionally, small, caring, individualized and enriching learning communities must be created to help all students maximize their learning potential, manage transitions, and become active learners for life. A variety of indictors must be used to evaluate progress toward achieving the change necessary to assure this outcome for all students.

General Conclusions

Cutting across all methods of data collection, including the literature review, the community conversations, and the promising practices, four conclusions were easily drawn. They provide the foundation for the complete set of recommendations presented later in this report. They are:

1. Focus on change of every high school in the state of Iowa;

2. A comprehensive approach, implementing the five characteristics in this report, is vital for all high schools in Iowa. A fragmented approach will not work;

3. Utilize the model presented in this report as the foundation for the high school component of all initiatives for improvement of education; and

4. The need for change is urgent, and it can only occur with a major commitment from all partners over a sustained period of time. The commitment is not just financial.

Call to Action: Immediate First Steps

The first steps for embarking on a change effort of this size will require time, the commitment of the State Board of Education, and the other partners as represented on the Focus on High Schools Leadership Team, to consistently over time reconfigure current resources, remove or phase-out barriers (policy or practice), prohibiting change at all levels and the commitment by all partners to statewide ongoing sustained deliberation over a long period of time.

The Foundation for Change: Focusing on Iowa High Schools report recommends to the State Board of Education and all partners that:

1. All partner agencies and organizations involved in the development of this report commit publicly to their continued active participation in designing and implementing strategies to accomplish the recommendations.

2. The State Board of Education and the Iowa Department of Education commission the Focus on High Schools Leadership Team to design and implement a process for the communication of this report and next steps to all stakeholders.

3. The Department of Education conducts a thorough review of relevant policies for alignment with the characteristics and elements in this report and recommends policy modifications as necessary to eliminate barriers to implementation.

4. The State Board of Education and the Iowa Department of Education establish a process for integrating these recommendations into items that are integrated into district accreditation standards and evaluation processes.

5. Technical assistance must be developed for all levels of stakeholder engagement, including the active involvement of the wider community in the change process, and for the organizations and associations working to support and sustain change and continuous improvement over time.

> **" All of this will not be finished in the first one hundred days, nor in the first one thousand days, nor in the life of this Administration, nor even perhaps in our lifetime on this planet…But let us begin."**
>
> *- President John F. Kennedy*

Case for Change

Many measures indicate that Iowa schools are among the best in the nation. Graduation rates are approximately 90%, and standardized test scores are near the top in the nation. These results are supported by strong community involvement, with learning goals guided by local school boards in partnership with parents, teachers, and other community members. Currently, 82% of Iowa's high school graduates indicate they intend to pursue post-secondary education or training. Iowa has a long and proud tradition of valuing education and in many ways sets the standard for the nation.

Despite our successes, Iowa cannot rest on its laurels and expect to meet the educational needs of its young people in the future. To fully realize our vision, *we must have an educational system that at all levels, assures that each student will be prepared to reach his or her potential to fully participate in and advance our democratic society*. This implies that as the skills and abilities of our students develop, the *outcomes* of our learning programs will equip them to meet the challenges they will face in the future. This implies that we must develop our young people as whole persons. This implies that we must anticipate the skills and abilities that will be needed in the latter part of the century. This implies that we face many challenges.

Many indications exist that make a case for *significant* and *on-going* change in high schools. The following are some of the most compelling issues:

- National data indicate that high schools remain a place where students may receive instruction from under educated, under experienced teachers, experience violence, engage in risky behaviors, and become disengaged.

- Employers and post-secondary institutions suggest that incoming employees don't have the basic skills necessary to succeed in their respective arenas. They also claim that they are spending more time remediating individuals who lack necessary skills.

- In Iowa, the number of eleventh graders in mathematics and reading assessments are substantially lower than the number of fourth and eighth graders. Further, reading scores in the ninth, tenth, and eleventh grades have declined slightly since 1996. Most recent data indicates a slight upward turn in these scores.

- High school curricula continue to be defined and assessed in terms of Carnegie units of study rather than desired learning outcomes that can be measured and that accurately reflect local needs and societal goals. This contributes to the perception cited above of employers and post-secondary educators that high school graduates lack necessary skills.

- There continue to be significant differences between small and large school districts in Iowa. For example, the percentage of teachers with advanced degrees is over four times greater in larger districts, teacher salaries $8000 below the state average in small districts. Teachers in smaller districts have twice the number of assignments than their colleagues have in the larger districts. Further, ACT® scores in the smallest districts average 21.1 compared with 22.3 in the largest systems.

- Iowa's overall success and leadership position mask important demographic issues with respect to student achievement. African-American, Latino, and Asian-American students consistently score below other learners on the ACT® exam. There are also ACT® differences by gender. Males score higher on mathematics and science than females, while females score higher than males in English and reading. Gaps in achievement of minorities and students from low socio-economic backgrounds also exist at the secondary level.

- The teacher workforce in Iowa is diminishing due to an exodus of professionals from the state and increasing numbers of teachers reaching retirement age. There is not a large pool of potential new secondary teachers for the state to entice into the teaching profession, and teacher pay in Iowa continues to rank relatively low nationwide.

Iowa must begin to address these challenges immediately and with resolve. It will take a strong and sustained partnership between communities, parents, educators, and government to make the changes needed.

- Some changes will likely be a matter of addressing policies that hinder progress.

- Some changes will require local and state educational leadership to better utilize existing resources.

- Some changes will require better alignment of pre-K, elementary, secondary, and post-secondary educational systems.

- Some changes will most likely require long term financial commitment.

What is clear is that a critical part of educational reform in Iowa is to *Focus on High Schools*. Iowa has excellent schools, but there are significant challenges ahead. We must attack those challenges now to prepare our children for the future.

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Literature Review

> *"If bottom-up and top-down reforms need to be in sync to make and sustain progress as a whole system, the state expectations for high schools need better definition."*
> *Martinez and Bray (2002, p.3)*

Educational reform has been a renewed focus of national, state, and local efforts since *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) first identified the need to improve student learning and success. Since then a substantial amount of time, money, and effort have been committed to determining the most effective means to increase student achievement by improving educational systems. Although the targeted end result of these reform efforts has been to increase the success of high school graduates in post-secondary settings and careers, most efforts have focused on reform at the elementary or middle school levels. A review of projects funded by the Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration program of the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, for example, indicated that the majority of funded projects focused on reform at the elementary or middle school levels.

Despite more than a decade of reform, high schools remain a place where students may receive instruction from under-educated, under-experienced teachers (National Association of Secondary School Principals, 1996); experience violence; engage in risky behaviors (Eccles & Gootman, 2001), and may become disengaged or even drop-out (Martinez & Bray, 2002). Employers and post-secondary institutions continue to report that many high school graduates do not have the skills necessary to succeed and must engage in some remedial work (Castellano, Stringfield, & Stone, 2002). In Iowa, for example, participation rates of eleventh graders in math and reading assessments are substantially lower than participation rates of fourth and eighth graders. In addition, reading scores for students in grades nine, ten, and eleven have declined slightly since 1996 (Iowa Department of Education, 2001).

The need to focus reform efforts within high schools is clear and yet very little research or policy work has actually been completed at the high school level. A report prepared by the National Alliance for the American High School (Martinez & Bray, 2002) indicated that state policies related to high schools have changed very little in the past 20 years. The report goes on to state that the laws and regulations related to high school courses and graduation have more influence on practice than those related to student achievement of standards.

"Effective schools are small, intentional, caring learning communities: simple, flexible, collegial, demanding."

Ted Sizer (2001, August)

In addition, a review of recent literature on high school reform reveals that very few reform efforts would meet the definition of scientifically- based research as defined within the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. Most of the literature represents descriptions of valid efforts to implement specific strategies or program models, or position statements of foundations, organizations, and agencies (Castellano, Stringfield, & Stone, 2002; Mayer, Mullens, & Moore, 2000). Change efforts have been small in scope; aimed at a school or portions of a school (Institute for Research and Reform in Education, 2001). While there are state and district level reform efforts underway, they have not yet resulted in comprehensive change (Institute for Research and Reform in Education, 2001).

A review of the literature was conducted to help Iowans begin to study effective high schools and focus efforts to improve the success of Iowa high school graduates. This review began as an empirical meta-analysis of existing research. As the review proceeded, however, it became apparent that the limitations of the existing research, as well as those of available resources precluded use of the meta-analysis methodology.

The literature reflects many ways to organize information regarding high school reform. For example, the National Center for Education Statistics (Mayers, Mullen, & Moore, 2000), uses three types of quality indicators (school context, teachers, and classrooms). The National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) organizes information according to thirteen categories (NASSP, 1996) and the Urban Education Network of Iowa (2001), using a format similar to NASSP, identified twelve categories.

Although the literature on high school reform differs in methodology content, and intent, common themes of effective high schools easily emerged from the various procedures, findings, and recommendations. A method of constant comparison was then used to develop a compilation of the literature. After extensively reviewing the literature, the Institute for Research and Reform in Education's framework (2001) identifying seven critical elements of school reform was used as the point of comparison for the literature compilation presented here. This selection was made because of the extensive research review on which the categories were based and their focus on student and adult outcomes.

Documents addressing high school reform published after 1995 were collected and reviewed. Findings and recommendations in each document were then compared to the original IRRE categories. As new findings or recommendations emerged, the Department of Education Literature Review team made adjustments to the original categories resulting in five characteristics of effective high schools and 21 critical elements or indicators of the five characteristics.

The five characteristics of effective high schools are presented in this document as a frame for discussing, promoting, and affecting high school reform in Iowa. First, the assumptions underlying the framework are discussed. Then each characteristic and its corresponding critical elements are described. Successful strategies and sample resources for each characteristic are included as an appendix.

Table 1. Framework for a Focus on Iowa High Schools: Five Characteristics and 19 Critical Elements of Effective High Schools

A. Students have deep and supportive relationships with adults over sustained periods of time.

1. Students have adults they can talk to about academics and view adults as consistent and fair.
2. Students view school staff as consistent and fair.
3. Students believe that school staff cares deeply about them- more than just how the students perform in one classroom or activity.

B. Students have enriched opportunities to learn, perform, and be recognized.

1. Climate is welcoming and inclusive.
2. Schoolwork is relevant to present and future life.
3. Differing learner needs are met through flexible and varied instructional strategies.
4. Students are involved in and benefit from a variety of co-curricular and extracurricular activities.
5. There are formal and informal ways for all students to collaborate, be leaders, have work recognized, demonstrate their uniqueness, and contribute to school and community.
6. Students are strategically involved in leadership planning and change across all improvement initiatives, including student-teacher relations.

C. All efforts are focused on a clear, powerful educational agenda.

1. High academic expectations are clearly communicated for each student.
2. Students' educational experiences focus on outcomes beyond the diploma.
3. Curricula are clearly delineated and focused.

D. Students, staff, parents and community share responsibility for student success.

1. Students believe they have responsibility for their own success or failure.
2. Teachers believe they have responsibility for the success or failure of their students.
3. Parents are engaged in and take responsibility for their student's education.
4. Teachers are highly knowledgeable, apply affective and innovative learning strategies, and operate in a positive, professionally orientated community.
5. District and school administrators work with the community to provide the necessary support and resources for effective teaching (including time, materials, physical space, staffing and funds).
6. The community believes they have the responsibility to provide support and resources to the district and administrators to assure student success.

E. School is engaged in dynamic, continuous improvement that is student focused.

1. School leadership understands and models that education is dynamic and must be responsive to changes in the local, state, and national communities.
2. Effective partnerships exist with entities outside of the school for the purpose of continuous improvement.
3. The school regularly reviews its goals, measures its effectiveness, and makes appropriate modifications to improve student success.
4. The school climate encourages risk taking and innovation.
5. Health and fitness of students and staff is monitored and interventions provided as necessary to maximize the academic and personal achievements of all.

Fundamental Tenets of the Five Characteristics of Effective High Schools

Student focused. Student success (cognitive, social, emotional, and behavioral well being) is the primary tenet to the characteristics of effective high schools. Underlying this framework is the core belief that decisions and actions are made to benefit student success, not maintain the existing system.

Characteristics are interrelated. Although each characteristic independently represents a complexity of elements and strategies, not one characteristic in-and-of itself is sufficient. Neither will each characteristic occur at the same level within and across schools. In fact, it is the interaction of the characteristics that results in ongoing change and improvement. Take, for example, a high school with a long history of high drop-out rates, high expulsion rates, low scores on district assessments and a staff that have become frustrated or given up. Basically, there is no evidence of any of the five characteristics of effective schools. New administration is hired to increase the effectiveness of the high school. The administration begins an evolutionary planning with staff, students, parents, and community members (Characteristic C). Planning develops and strategies are implemented, staff responsibility for student success increases (Characteristic D); and opportunities for learning and performing become enriched and increase in number (Characteristic B). [Resulting in an increase in the responsiveness of leadership to remove ineffective structures and add innovations (Characteristic E).]

A characteristic is not evidenced until all its critical elements exist. Each of the elements listed with a characteristic are critical to comprehensive reform of any magnitude and length. Again, the level to which any one element occurs will fluctuate depending upon any number of variables, including the interactions across characteristics and critical elements. For example, having high academic expectations for all students (critical element C1) does not completely demonstrate that a school has a clear, powerful educational agenda. Simply having expectations means very little without a curriculum that supports those expectations (critical element C3).

There are many ways to get there. Education has often been accused of using the "flavor of the month" approach to improvement. It is not uncommon to hear "wait around long enough and it will go away." The reality is that teaching and learning styles, as well as district and school contexts vary considerably. Strategies that work in one school may not work in another. Similarly, strategies that did not work the first time, may work at a different time. For that reason, many strategies that have been successful in building a characteristic are presented. Although listed with a specific characteristic, any one strategy may affect any number of characteristics. The listing of strategies is not inclusive, but merely represents those strategies most commonly found in the literature. Many of the strategies have their own research base and the reader is encouraged to investigate those that are of interest.

A. STUDENTS HAVE DEEP AND SUPPORTIVE RELATIONSHIPS WITH ADULTS OVER SUSTAINED PERIODS OF TIME

Every major school reform effort includes the fundamental belief that "better relationships between adults and students contribute to improved educational outcomes for students" (Institute for Research and Reform in Education, 2001; Lee, Bryk, & Smith, 1993; NASSP, 1996; UEN, 2001). Research shows that student achievement increases when students receive more adult support and guidance during instructional periods and from the same adults over longer periods of time (Murphy, Beck, Crawford, Hodges, & McGaughy, 2001). For example, in a meta-analysis of data from *High Schools that Work*, Kaufman, Brady, and Teitelbaum (2000) found that student perceptions that academic and vocational teachers were working together to improve math, reading and writing skills had almost as much positive effect in improving student learning as curriculum changes. They also found that increases in the amount of time spent talking to guidance counselors and teachers about school programs were directly related to increases in schools' mean assessment scores.

While the literature on overall school reform provides much support for student-teacher relationships, it does not clearly identify optimum ratios or optimum length of contact. Small decreases in student/adult ratios, such as a decrease from 28:1 to 25:1, have not been shown to affect student learning. Large decreases such as a 15:1 ratio, however, have shown to have a positive impact on student learning (Institute for Research and Reform in Education, 2001).

There are many ways to define "deep and supportive relationships" and the literature consists of many strategies for building them. Three elements are presented here as a way of organizing the literature's approaches to student/teacher relationships:

1. Students have adults they can talk to about academics and view adults as consistent and fair.

2. Students view school staff as consistent and fair.

3. Students believe that adults (teachers) care deeply about them- more than just how the student performs in one classroom.

Please see Chart A on the following page.

Chart A outlines the successful strategies found in the literature that support the critical elements of this characteristic.

A. Students have deep and supportive relationships with adults over sustained periods of time.	
Critical Element	**Successful Strategies**
1. Students have adults they can talk to about academics and view adults as consistent and fair. 2. Students view school staff as consistent and fair. 3. Students believe that adults (teachers) care deeply about them- more than just how the student performs in one classroom.	a. Lower student/adult ratios especially during instructional times: no clear messages about optimal ratios; small decreases in student to teacher ratios (e.g., 28:1-25:1) made no difference; dramatic decreases (e.g., 15:1) have made a difference. b. Longer instructional periods, for example 1 to 2 hours with same teacher utilizing innovative instructional strategies. c. Alternative scheduling (e.g., block scheduling, seminar courses, independent studies, cooperative learning) d. Reduce the number of classes taught by a teacher over the semester or year e. Group one teacher with a larger number of students to allow smaller groups of students with other teachers f. Rearrange staff positions, bringing in administrators and support staff. g. Group small teams of teachers with the same students over a number of years h. Smaller high schools: literature tends to identify 1,200-1,500 as the average number of students in a high school. Some literature identify anything over 1,000 as a large high school; most suggest the optimum size as 500-600, but some go as small as 200 i. Involvement of parents, employers and other community members in the school (e.g., advisor/mentor program)

B. STUDENTS HAVE ENRICHED OPPORTUNITIES TO LEARN, PERFORM AND BE RECOGNIZED.

"Improving the quality of classroom practice remains the most immediate lever for enhancing student achievement, but viewing schools from an organizational perspective shows that improvement of classroom practice itself will require reform efforts that extend well beyond educating individual teachers to teach their subjects well."
Newmann (1997, p.3)

"In order to be emotionally engaged in school, students must believe that what they are learning there is either interesting or valuable-and preferably, both. This does not mean that they must find every lesson, every assignment, and every bit of information communicated in class absolutely riveting. But to become and remain engaged and exerting effort, they will acquire some bit of useful knowledge, learn an important skill, or grow in some way that is fulfilling, satisfying, or personally meaningful." (Steinberg, 1997, pp.72-73)

Research clearly indicates that students who are engaged in school show greater academic achievement than those students who are not engaged in school (McNeely, C.A., Nonnemaker, J.M., & Blum, R.W., 2002; NASSP, 1996). There is also, perhaps more than other areas, an abundance of research-based strategies to increase the performance of students. The majority of this research, however, concentrates on validating the strategy itself. Very little of the literature integrates the strategy in comprehensive school reform. Suggested here are five critical elements to integrating isolated techniques into broader, comprehensive school improvement:

1. Climate is welcoming and inclusive.

2. Schoolwork is relevant to present and future life.

3. Differing learner needs are met through flexible and varied
    instructional strategies.

4. Students are involved in and benefit from a variety of co-curricular and
    extracurricular activities.

5. There are formal and informal ways for all students to:
    Collaborate, be leaders, have work recognized, demonstrate their
    uniqueness, and contribute to school and community.

B. Students have enriched opportunities to learn, perform, and be recognized.	
Critical Element	Successful Strategies
1. Climate is welcoming and inclusive. 2. Schoolwork is relevant to present and future life. 3. Differing learner needs are met through flexible and varied instructional strategies. 4. Students are involved in a benefit from a variety of co-curricular and extracurricular activities. 5. There are formal and informal ways for all students to: collaborate, be leaders, 6. Have work recognized, demonstrate their uniqueness, and contribute to school and community.	a. Common core of activities (academic and nonacademic) b. Heterogeneous grouping (abilities, races, and SES) c. Peer mentoring, mediation, peer tutoring d. Teacher instructional skills e. Reduction in number of students that any one student interacts with on a daily basis (e.g., small learning communities) f. Use of technology. g. Experiential learning, out-of-class connections, real-life activities, solve real-world problems. h. Career-oriented programs (e.g., career awareness, exploration, and counseling activities, curriculum aligned with career paths, technical based programs) i. Alternative courses (e.g., independent studies, learning labs, leadership wilderness courses, cultural enrichment courses) j. Use of sites other than the school for instruction. k. Virtual courses **l.** Infused a multi-cultural perspective into educational programming. m. Student advisory groups, tutorial settings, honor councils, one-on-one meetings with staff, student forums **n.** Non-traditional time schedule, afternoon or evening programs.

C. ALL EFFORTS ARE FOCUSED ON A CLEAR, POWERFUL EDUCATIONAL AGENDA.

The literature is full of studies demonstrating the connection between expectations and student performance. Standards-based reform has resulted in strategies for developing and articulating those expectations. Review of a broad range of literature, however, suggests that having high expectations for all students is not sufficient in setting a clear, powerful educational agenda. The expectations need to reach further than receipt of a diploma. The at-risk literature, for example, suggests that without a reason to perform well, many students will simply do what needs to be done to get by or will disengage completely. Further, expectations need to be backed by a well-defined curricular focus. These three elements compose the framework for discussing and identifying a clear, powerful educational agenda:

1. High academic expectations are clearly communicated for each student.

2. Students' educational experiences focus on outcomes beyond the diploma.

3. Curricula are clearly delineated and focused.

The high school diploma, as a terminal credential, has weak power to compel high achievement.
(Murphy et. al., p.94)

C. All efforts are focused on a clear, powerful educational agenda.	
Critical Element	**Successful Strategies**
1. High academic expectations are clearly communicated for each student. 2. Students' educational experiences focus on outcomes beyond the diploma. 3. Curricula are clearly delineated and focused.	a. Existence of content standards and student benchmarks: clear agreement in the literature on the need to link standards and benchmarks at all levels of the curriculum; the literature differs on the benefits of a broad array of standards and benchmarks over a few, "in-depth" standards and benchmarks. b. Common core focused on high-level academic activity c. Academic expectations are regularly communicated to, understood, supported, and followed by students, staff and parents d. Systems for monitoring student progress e. Clear methods to identify students at risk of low achievement and methods for engaging them in the curriculum f. Authentic assessment g. Ongoing examination and evaluation of practices h. School goals are shared across "departments" and directly tie to the school purpose i. Credit given for actual learning, rather than "seat time" j. Alternative graduation requirements (e.g., performance portfolios, community service hours) k. Alteration (or elimination) of the Carnegie unit

D. STUDENTS, STAFF, PARENTS AND COMMUNITY SHARE RESPONSIBILITY FOR STUDENT SUCCESS

The importance of student, teacher, parent, and community involvement is well documented in the literature. For most of these stakeholder groups the literature includes strategies successful at increasing involvement such as the importance of quality teachers. Effective teachers have been shown to include those who were well prepared, matched teaching strategies to learner needs, and were engaged in their own professional development.

Some of the most impressive research done in the area of youth/adult partnerships has clearly demonstrated the positive effects on people and systems when youth actively participate in governing bodies (school boards, administrative teams, etc.) that are traditionally limited to adult participants. Current research shows that engaging youth in responsible decision-making in real-life situations has a profound impact on their motivation to achieve. One outcome of this system has been a professional climate where adults view youth as a valued resource (Zeldin, McDaniel, Topitzes & Clavert, 2000).

Recent trends in school reform have included increased parental and community involvement in a variety of ways. The research-base for this type of involvement is increasing and shows promise for affecting student achievement. Specifically, research is exploring effective methods to:

1) Address specific learning and support needs of parents so that they can, in turn, meet their basic obligations to the student.

2) Improve systems for communication.

3) Enhance the home-school connection and sense of community.

4) Elicit help, problem solving skills, and decision making of parents to meet classroom, school, and community needs.

The aim of community outreach is to develop greater involvement in schooling and enhance support for learning. Efforts in this area can include volunteer, mentor, recruitment, funding, and partnership arrangements for all students and outreach programs for hard-to-involve individuals and families.

A portion of the literature suggests that the collective responsibility of each stakeholder makes a high school effective and concludes that such involvement and participatory engagement is not possible without system support. This may come from school administration or teacher leaders at the building level or from central office at the district level. Either way, successful strategies require time, resources, physical space, staffing trends, and staff development support and evaluation to determine their impact on student success.

No one person in a school is solely responsible for the success or failure of a student. Exemplary high schools have recognized that fact and work to build a sense of responsibility. (Murphy et. al., p.157)

Chart D outlined the successful strategies found in the literature that supports the critical elements of this characteristic.

| D. Students, staff, parents, and community share responsibility for student success	
Critical Element	**Successful Strategies**
1. Students believe they have responsibility for their own success or failure. 2. Teachers believe they have responsibility for the success or failure of their students. 3. Parents are engaged in and take responsibility for their student's education. 4. Teachers are highly knowledgeable, apply affective and innovative learning strategies, and operate in a positive, professionally oriented community. 5. District and school administrators work with the community to provide necessary support and resources for effective teaching (including time, materials, physical space, staffing and funds). 6. The community believes they have the responsibility to provide support and resources to the district and administrators to assure student success.	a. Teams of teachers plan, evaluate, and revise programs and curriculum both departmental and cross-departmental b. Peer assessment and coaching c. Teachers involved in making decisions about their daily work and broader school issues (e.g., site-based councils, teacher leaders, school improvement committees) d. Traditional schedules altered to provided staff time to work together (during school hours and other blocks of time) e. Multiple strategies and opportunities for professional development and improvement that align with individual teacher needs, overall school goals, and that focus on increasing student achievement: should be ongoing and include feedback and follow-up evaluations. f. Reflective dialogue study groups g. Decreased teacher load h. Common work spaces i. Use of support staff, volunteers and others to cover classes and create release time j. Parent groups, homework, post-school expectations & planning k. Teachers, staff, parents, students, and community engaged in conversation about the purpose of education

**E. SCHOOL IS ENGAGED IN DYNAMIC, CONTINUOUS
   IMPROVEMENT THAT IS STUDENT FOCUSED.**

Scholars of school reform use different structures to describe the process of improvement. Some, for example, describe schools as learning communities (e.g. NAASP, 1996; Senge, et. al., 2000), and others refer to change in terms of cycles (cf. ISEA, 2000). Common across these descriptions is the concept that educational change is influenced by a number of planned and unplanned factors (i.e., is dynamic) and as a result change is unavoidable. Effective schools embrace this concept of change and use it to improve themselves so that students achieve personal-social growth and academic success.

Every school reform effort has identified leadership as critical to successful reform. Although leadership has been used to refer to the individual or collective contribution of students, teachers, and parents, this level of leadership has not been found to be in, and of itself, sufficient to leverage long-lasting change (Fullan, 1993). Instead, the term leadership typically refers to the role of the principal. Principals of effective high schools are both instructional and cultural leaders (Murphy, Beck, Crawford, Hodges, & McGaughy, 2001). In their roles as instructional and cultural leaders, principals demonstrated their leadership in 4 ways:

1) directing school activities toward high expectations for student learning,
2) nurturing a collaborative work culture,
3) promoting innovation, reflection and development and,
4) working to achieve the social and structural supports needed for quality instruction (Newmann, 1997).

In Iowa, the Iowa State Education Association (2000) describes effective schools as having a leadership cycle and a management cycle. The leadership cycle occurs when long-term goals and core values are developed with broad school-community participation. The management cycle occurs when the school assesses the gap between what they want to achieve and what is actually occurring. Success4, an Iowa Department of Education initiative, defines system development as the development of an organization to continuously improve itself and live out its mission. In their model, critical elements for system development include guiding principles (i.e., shared beliefs, vision and mission) that are used to make decisions, a collaborative culture that supports learning and change, and creation of shared leadership structures, and widespread ownership of and commitment to the improvement effort.
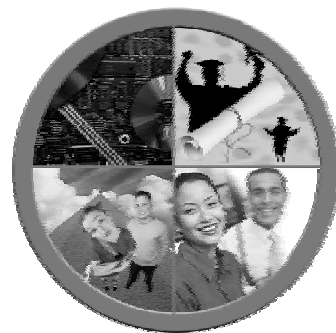
"It is simply unrealistic to expect that introducing reforms one by one, even major ones, in a situation which is basically not organized to engage in change will do anything but give reform a bad name."
Fullan (1993, p.3)

The four characteristics of schools engaged in dynamic, continuous improvement are:

1. School leadership understands and models that education is dynamic and must be responsive to changes in the local, state, and national communities.

2. Collaborative partnerships exist with parents and entities outside of the school.

3. School regularly measures its effectiveness and removes ineffective structures and adds innovations to improve student achievement.

4. Climate tolerates failure of new things, uses experiences as a step in the next direction.

E. School is engaged in dynamic, continuous improvement that is student focused.	
Critical Element	**Successful Strategies**
1. School leadership is responsive to changes in the local, state, and national communities. 2. Effective partnerships exist with entities outside of the school for the purpose of continuous improvement. 3. School regularly reviews its goals, measures its effectiveness and makes appropriate modifications to improve student process. 4. The school climate encourages risk-taking and innovation.	a. Established systemic, systematic processes such as evolutionary planning, collaborative improvement procedures, continuous monitoring, and problem solving processes. b. Implemented modifications such as organization of the school day and year, student groupings, departmental structures, curricular organization, credit options. c. Action-based research d. Innovative configuration mapping

Promising Practices

INTRODUCTION

It can be safely assumed that all Iowa high schools are employing strategies, which assist students in being successful. However, it can also be assumed that some schools are employing strategies that are meeting with extraordinary success. Based on this premise, a list of criteria was developed to help in identifying a sampling of these schools (Appendix A). This list was provided to staff in the Iowa Department of Education, Area Education Agencies, as well as Iowa administrators who were willing to help in the identification process.

Between 25 and 30 Iowa high schools were identified for further study using this technique. Interviews with a knowledgeable individual from each school were then conducted. In most cases, the person interviewed was an administrator. A list of interview questions (Appendix B) was provided to those doing the interviews. Some respondents, however chose to use more of an open-ended style and elaborated on the questions.

Based on the interviews, some general trends or themes emerged and those are presented below. In addition, the findings are summarized under the five characteristics identified through the literature as being critical for student success.

PROMISING PRACTICES CATEGORIZED BY 5 CHARACTERISTICS

Based on a literature review, five practices were identified as having significance for student success. These are supportive long-term relationships, opportunities to perform and gain recognition, focused efforts on an educational agenda, shared responsibilities for student success, and student focused continuous improvement. Information gleaned from the interviews is placed under these five categories in this section.

Supportive Long-Term Relationships

This theme is often mentioned in the literature as a way to facilitate student success. Unfortunately, it appears that supportive relationships that are consistent for all students are prevalent only at the elementary and early secondary levels (grades 7 and 8).

Counselor to student ratio was mentioned several times as a way to increase student success and reduce the number of discipline referrals. This is also supported in the literature. However, additional counselors are only beneficial if they are able to spend their time counseling, as opposed to other administrative duties, such as scheduling. The type of

counseling program may also play a critical role in this, such as a developmental guidance program.

A strategy that shows promise is student seminar groups. This can be defined as any formalized small group of students with identified purposes supervised by a faculty advisor. The focus of the group might include portfolio development, academic success, social/emotional development, etc. Meeting times vary, with some meeting daily for 20 minutes, and others meeting weekly or bi-monthly. The key factors for success of these groups appear to be ownership of this formalized process on the part of the administrative leaders and advisors, which may need to include preparation and teacher training. Based on personal experiences, teachers sometimes feel overwhelmed by these responsibilities, so the preparation helps with this.

Supportive relationships with adults can extend beyond teaching staff. They can include secretaries, teaching assistants, and other school staff. In some cases, community and parent volunteers might be involved to support this process.

Joint faculty-student committees that focus on improving the learning environment of the school are meeting with success at some schools. The committees may focus on different elements such as at-risk students or curriculum, but in general the faculty-student conversations appear to provide benefits for the school.

Opportunities to Perform and Gain Recognition

There was significant discussion identifying the importance of student participation in co-curricular activities. In addition to co-curricular activities that involve a selection process, there is value to activities that do not require levels of performance to participate. Examples of these activities may include yearbook, set crew, team managers, and science club environmental awareness trips.   Common components of all co-curricular activities are the sense of importance, contribution, and belonging that students acquire.

Student organizations such as special interest or diversity clubs have been successful in increasing awareness of community diversity, thus increasing tolerance and providing a voice for those individuals pursuing respect for each student.

Research on school size has been conducted for decades, with mixed results. Some researchers have advocated for high schools of a certain minimum enrollment, while others have pointed to a "quality versus quantity issue". Despite this debate, which is sure to rage on, implementation of best practices that provide quality programming in welcoming, engaging, safe environments can be found in many Iowa high schools, from some of the largest to some of the smallest. Beneath the surface of this issue lie real challenges for schools of all sizes.

Larger schools must strive to establish comfortable, welcoming climates where all students feel valued, capable, and able to participate, even with

a large and diverse student body. At the same time, the smallest schools must work creatively not only to preserve what may be a student friendly climate, but also to offer diverse and high quality programs. These may often be the result of collaborating with other schools.

Focused Efforts on a Comprehensive Educational Agenda

Some schools have identified skills above and beyond those measured on standardized tests that are important for student success and are assessing these skills as part of graduation requirements. These include being a knowledgeable person, a complex thinker, effective communicator, collaborative participant, quality producer, and self-directed learner. Measurement of these skills is typically by performance assessment (observation), project completion, or portfolio.

In several schools, organization of the school day appeared to play an important role in student success. Specifically, longer class periods were mentioned as being an important factor, usually in the form of block scheduling. Dividing the school year into trimesters was one avenue schools used to increase the number of different courses students could complete. This model increases the opportunity to select additional elective courses while still completing a basic core offering.

Shared Responsibility for Student Success

One practice that supports this concept is placing a variety of school-related information on the web. In this way, parents and students, as well as other stakeholders, can access curriculum documents, including standards and benchmarks, course schedules, student assignments, etc. In another case, a technology problem (lighting system for a stage) brought together members of the community and school to complete an important school project and provide students with supplemental learning opportunities.

Opportunities to expand the learning environment beyond the walls of the school hold promise for student success. This is already being done in areas such as work experience for credit, internships, volunteer experiences, cadet teaching (older students assisting/teaching younger students), etc. However, such activities need to be highly structured so they are the most valuable experience for both the student and employer, and are linked to specific academic goals. Other promising ideas include more career exploration, program sharing among schools, and virtual education such as on-line courses and distance learning opportunities, where applicable.

Co-curricular activities are identified as strengthening and reinforcing academic success. For example, expeditionary learning (backpacking, etc.), sports and clubs provide opportunities for recognition, link education to other life experiences, and ultimately make learning more enjoyable.

Student-Centered Continuous Improvement

Local, state, and national calls for accountability have been well heard as we come to ask and expect more from our schools than ever before. Efforts toward accountability will pose challenges to high schools, as they seek to balance several issues that, at times, may seem to compete. These issues may include the social-emotional needs of students parried with the responsibility of schools to provide basic education. Authentic "real world" assessments are contrasted with a rapidly expanding emphasis on standardized testing. All of these are set against the background of maintaining local control and involvement while being responsive to state and federal mandates. Student focused continuous improvement can be defined in several ways, including an emphasis on standardized test scores built upon a strong academic foundation. Most schools are interested in student improvement beyond test scores alone, including student well being, sense of community involvement and service.

At the elementary level, the emphasis appears to be on the student, whereas at the secondary level this emphasis appears to shift to the curriculum. Individual elementary teachers generally work with students across curricular areas. At the secondary level, changes of emphasis may be more challenging, as much instruction takes place in curricular departments. Divisions between curricular areas are reinforced by school walls as well as master schedules. There does not appear to be many strong influences to encourage cross-curricular collaboration at the secondary level.

One area that continues to be mentioned is the need for improved reading and writing. This includes being able to communicate accurately with a specific audience in mind. Measurable improvement requires more than just additional reading and writing experiences, since students may simply be strengthening poor comprehension, grammar and writing mechanics habits. Change requires teacher expertise and one-on-one assistance with students. One school is engaging teachers as volunteer members of teams who address reading performance issues that are identified by school administrators. These teams perform action-based research and make improvement recommendations based on that research. Prior to the creation of these teams, the school spent in-service time over the past two years in quality workshops facilitated by outside consultants, and seminars in action research methods.

One high school reports success in using a non-graded evaluation system, using only pass/incomplete. In order to fulfill a writing competency requirement for graduation, an 80% level of competency is required. Students with incomplete work receive assistance until they can perform at the required level.

SUMMARY

Many promising practices are being designed and implemented because they appear to be good for students; however, there is not enough evidence to generalize these to the entire state. Valley of Elgin is different from West Des Moines Valley. In many schools, there are pockets of excellence and promising practices in one or more of the characteristics, but there were no schools interviewed where all five of the characteristics were strongly in evidence.

Some of the practices are not necessarily new, but represent years of success with well-established practices. Given the diversity of approaches, and the optimism surrounding some of these promising practices, it is apparent that a "one size fits all" approach may be counterproductive to achieving real improvement.

There is not as much research on what practices really work in secondary schools as there is with elementary schools. This research needs to be done. It is expected that further research will reveal other good educational practices, some which will work well in one school, but not so well in others.

No matter what, leadership and teacher quality are key success factors. Excellent practitioners are needed to move the promising educational practices identified by research into the secondary classrooms where they can really make a difference. This issue is not simply a matter of evaluating individual teacher performance, but involves continuous improvement of the entire educational process as well. The process must be research based, engaging, and collaborative in nature. It must encourage high levels of performance from teachers, administrators, students, and members of the community. Further, overall leadership must create an atmosphere that eliminates barriers to student and teacher progress, and encourages investment in the improvement process. This may require a closer look at how schools are organized, and how well the process integrates and aligns the contributions of all stakeholders.

Community Conversations

Introduction

Community forums were held across the state as a means of engaging all Iowans in the discussion about our high schools and what may need to occur so that they are highly effective in preparing all students for post-secondary learning.   Partnering with the area education agencies, eighteen forums throughout the state were held beginning in the spring of 2002 and concluding in the fall of 2002.

The team members working on this project made gallant attempts to ensure that these community conversations were inclusive and encompassed the far reaches of the state. While the participants in these forums did represent a geographically diverse population, including voices from both the urban and rural communities, there is a lack of racial and ethnic and socioeconomic diversity. The forums represent only the thoughts of a segment of Iowa's population and should not be interpreted as a mandate from all citizens.

The forum process provided multiple ways of gathering information from Iowans:

1.) information was gathered the interviews of over 150 Iowans conducted by the framing team (see Appendix E);
2.) eighteen moderated community conversations;
3.) survey and post forum questions;
4.) interviews with moderators of the community conversations; and
5.) community comments posted on the website.

An outside consultant worked with Department of Education staff to provide the facilitation for the framing team and to analyze the data collected from the five approaches named above.

The community conversation discussion guide was framed around three approaches of looking at high schools and was based on themes raised during the interviews with a diverse group of Iowa citizens. The intent of the community conversations was to find where Iowans agreed and where there was disagreement about how this issue should be addressed. The text of the full report is found in Appendix E and includes the *Framing Questionnaire* and the *Community Discussion Guide.*

Trends Summary

The trends identified through this research phase were consistent with the five characteristics and 19 critical elements identified in the literature research described in section 1. Student success requires a commitment and involvement of all stakeholders for raising student achievement. The important elements are quality teaching, an environment that promotes student acceptance, involvement and high expectations, and support

structures that facilitate student success. The promising practices identified in section 2 indicate that many of these fundamental elements exist in Iowa's high schools. The community conversations highlighted opportunities to expand these promising practices, and a desire on the part of the community to be involved in and to support efforts to better prepare Iowa's high school students for a changing world.

General Themes:

1. Give every student his or her best possible chance to succeed. Cookie cutter education does not work for all. High standards may encourage some students to excel, but will leave too many students behind if they are universally applied without regard to the individual student's needs and capacity. Students face challenges that are different from those experienced in previous generations and require new solutions and resources.

2. Commit to building healthy, collaborative relationships between parents, students, teachers and the community. Another consistent theme was the importance of relationships. These relationships included those within the schools (student to student and student to staff) as well as the relationship between the school and the community at large. The role of the adult in the students life was viewed as important both to academic success as well as being a tool for students experiencing the life challenges that come with being a teenager. The relationships that students form with each other were seen as important tools necessary for student success at school, at work, and in life. A commonly cited concern was the lack of connections that students feel toward the community.

3. The educational agenda needs to be clearly defined and should be relevant, integrated and prepare students for life. The conversations revealed the need in Iowa to align our educational system. The alignment needs to be made between elementary, middle, and high schools as well as between the PK-12, post-secondary education and the world of work. The conversations presented a tension between the purpose of schools and the role that extracurricular activities played in the lives of high school students. It became clear that schools and teachers must be given the resources necessary to meet a complex educational agenda.

4. The current school structure may be outdated and in need of an overhaul. The conversations included the need for state leadership to ensure that our high schools were of a size that allowed students to have access to the number and quality of courses that were needed to prepare them for post-secondary education and ultimately a career. Both the length of the school year and the structure of the school day were discussed. Matching the high school students' biological clock to the school day was also brought up in the conversation.

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5. Participants are willing to embrace change with some caution. Participants overwhelmingly support change and want to be proactive in a changing world. However, they want to make sure that change does not include abandoning what is good about Iowa's high schools and that they have a voice in crafting the future.

6. Continue the community conversations and include voices that were missing from the first round of conversations. Participants were grateful for the opportunity to express their ideas and concerns and are enthusiastic about future opportunities to continue the conversations and include others who have not yet weighed in.

The Five Characteristics

Utilizing the five characteristics identified in the literature review, the following forum discussions were supportive of these characteristics.

A. Supportive Long-Term Relationships
- Recognition that the high school is where long-term relationships have dissipated. There are more intentional long-term relationships between adults and students at the elementary and middle school levels.
- Recognition that the state needs to look at the size of our schools for effectiveness. Some of our high schools may be too small and some too big to be effective.

B. Opportunities to Perform and Gain Recognition
- Recognition that there are no "cookie cutter" approaches to high schools since students are not the same. While there are high expectations for all students, they are not necessarily the same expectations.
- Debate around the role of extracurricular activities in student achievement. This tension was greater when sports were discussed. Some voices see sports as a way of increasing retention and teaching students valuable socialization and skills valued by employers. Others expressed the need to concentrate on academic achievement.
- Discussion about being able to learn and perform outside the "walls of the school house".
- Recognition that students need to be free of concern about personal safety in order to learn.

C. Focused Efforts on a Comprehensive Educational Agenda
- Conversation about needing to know why our students are attending high school. The state needs to come together and agree that learning is the focus of school.
- Discussion about the need to connect the learning before high school with the learning that comes after high school.
- Dialogue about high expectations for all and a correlation between high expectations and achievement

- Recognition that there is a need to provide the resources (time, talent, and money) to truly make a difference at the high school level. Tension over where these resources would come from or whether they were ever going to be available.
- Discussion about the state taking leadership at both the state and local level.
- Agreement that success in school (attainment including graduation) needed to be measured by what the student knows and not by seat time (Carnegie Unit).

D. Shared Responsibility for Student Success
- Recognition that the community and parents play a role in the success or failure of students at the high school level.
- Overwhelming support for community involvement
- Desire expressed for more parental involvement and for the high school to open up to parents being involved.
- Student voice indicating a desire to be a part of the process of what should and can happen at the high school. Students enrolled in alternative school settings were especially interested in being involved as they have a unique and valuable vantage point when discussing the traditional high school.
- Conversations around teachers being accountable for student learning. There should be a way of removing teachers who are not performing.

E. Student-Centered Continuous Improvement
- Discussions that centered around giving each student his or her best possible chance to succeed.
- Dialogue around the need to care about the whole child
- Conversations about the need to consider the students "biological" clocks when addressing what may need to happen in the high school
- Recognition that there is a need to look at the structure of high schools to fit the learning needs of students as opposed to meeting the needs of the present system. This means looking at the duration of time in high schools, the three months off in the summer, and how to incorporate the extracurricular activities meaningfully into the curriculum.

The information from the community forums was consistent with what was found in the literature review. It was clear from the post forum interviews and questionnaires that Iowans wish to continue to be involved as the state moves forward to improve the high school experience for all students.

Recommendations from the Cross-Bureau and Leadership Teams for Focusing on High Schools

The following recommendations are organized into General Recommendations and Recommendations related to each of the Five Characteristics of Effective High Schools. We intend that these recommendations present a comprehensive framework for change in Iowa high schools. Although they are being presented to the State Board of Education, we offer these recommendations to provide guidance to all of the components of our educational system that relate to high school education.

General Recommendations

1. **Focus on change of *every* high school in the state of Iowa**

    A. A great deal of attention has been paid to school reform in the last fifteen years. Much of it has focused on elementary grades and middle schools, with less attention being paid to transforming education at the high school level.

    B. High schools often mirror college and university level instruction in form and curricula, which does not meet student needs.

    C. High schools must play a more pivotal role in student development, and increased focus is needed to ensure that high school education is developmentally appropriate.

    D. All high schools in the state can and must improve. Although there are many indicators of success, continuous improvement is required across the board to meet the future needs of all students. Such reform has been called for in numerous studies, and was echoed by the participants in the community forums we conducted throughout the state.

2. **A *comprehensive* approach, implementing the five characteristics in this report, is vital for all high schools in Iowa. A fragmented approach will not work.**

    A. The proposed characteristics in this report constitute a complete framework for improvement. They are well established in the literature, and there is ample documentation that these are the basic building blocks.

    B. There will be a tendency to adopt a few of the characteristics, measure their outcomes, and declare success. However, to

truly accomplish the goals set out in this report, the entire model must be adopted as the foundation for change.

C. The promising practices investigation completed as part of this study indicates that many high schools in Iowa incorporate some of these critical practices into their programs. However, few if any utilize the characteristics systematically.

D. Successful high school change, whether through virtual or regional academies, restructuring existing programs, or creating new ones, must include *all* five of the characteristics in *every* high school.

3. **Utilize the model presented in this report as the *foundation* for the high school component of all initiatives for improvement of education**

A. Because the proposed characteristics are considered fundamental, they can provide the necessary input to various on-going and future efforts to improve education in Iowa.

B. Create on-going collaboration among all components of our educational system from pre-school through higher education. These elements must be aligned for Iowa's educational system to be as effective as possible.

4. **The need for change is urgent, and it can only occur with a major commitment from all partners over a sustained period of time. The commitment is not just financial.**

A. Change must begin immediately. Ultimately, this state must address funding priorities for education, but that must not stand in the way of action. Many of the necessary changes can be developed through processes that focus the use of resources and marshal community interests in education, without the expectation of significant additional financial resources.

B. For this change to be successful, it must involve all constituencies and will require educational leadership that focuses on the best interests of students and transcends competing interests.

C. Change must be on going. The model presented here requires immediate action, time to implement, and long-term commitment by all partners.

Recommendations Specific to the Five Characteristics of Effective High Schools

Characteristic A: Students have deep and supportive relationships with adults over sustained periods of time.

1. **Move toward optimum learning communities: size, student/adult ratio, and time.**

    A. The most important notion in this recommendation is the idea of high schools becoming "learning communities." This is intended to be a broad idea that involves students, staff, and community in the learning process. It involves students, staff, and community all believing that they are partners in the success of students. It requires that high schools be viewed as comprehensive, including class work, activities, community service, internships, and the like.

    B. When viewed this way, the challenges become less daunting. For example, moving toward a more desirable student/adult ratio, such as 15:1 might be accomplished in conjunction with community partners and school personnel other than teachers, and would not necessarily require a significant increase in faculty size.

    C. Large schools could be reorganized into learning teams and units that provide more concentrated opportunities for students and adults to interact without reducing the over all size of the school.

    D. For small schools, the challenge is to create a learning community that is big enough to provide a vibrant program that meets the varied needs of students. Again, the community can play a vital role as part of that learning environment, distance learning can enhance opportunities, and various types of regional enhancements could provide for special needs of some students.

    E. Time with adults and planning time for staff is another major challenge. This report cites a number of creative solutions to this problem that do not require large infusion of financial support to accomplish.

    F. The change called for in this area cannot occur just within the school itself. As noted, community resources, creativity, and commitment will be needed from many directions to form nurturing learning communities in our high schools.

2. **Use current resources differently.**

    A. The challenge of this recommendation will be met the best by creative *local* solutions focused on the goals of the recommendation. We already invest a great deal of money in our schools, and this recommendation requires that we re-think how we use that investment.

    B. The State Board of Education and the Department of Education can play a crucial role in implementing this recommendation by the way in which they structure their programs to provide the framework, incentives, and technical support necessary for change.

3. **Build caring relationships (in the building and community wide).**

    A. The key to student success is building caring relationships. This recognition must occur among students, school personnel, and community members.

    B. Everyone must realize that they must play a role in student success and in creating a learning environment that nurtures students to become their best.

4. **Pay careful attention to professional development: pre-service, induction, and in-service.**

    A. In order for this recommendation and many of the others presented here to be successful, careful attention needs to be paid to teacher training and development. Particularly at the high school level, teachers must possess significant knowledge in their discipline, and much of their preparation focuses on obtaining the required knowledge. Much classroom teaching focuses on the cognitive development of students and on their knowledge of subject matter. An increased emphasis needs to be placed on learning about the affective and motor domains of learning.

    B. This has implications for the preparation of pre-service teachers as well as the need to properly induct new teachers into the learning environment of the school. It also will require continued professional development for practicing teachers.

5. **Seek and monitor student and community feedback concerning the learning environment.**

    A. Measures needed to assess this characteristic will be different than what we have traditionally used to monitor student success. Additional indicators based on new types of student feedback will be needed to continuously improve in this area.

B. Further, since students will be more engaged with the community, means will need to be developed to obtain feedback from the community.

Characteristic B: Students have enriched opportunities to learn, perform, and be recognized.

1. Recognize that each student is a unique learner.

A. High school curricula tend to be relatively static and inflexible. To best meet the learning needs of all students, individual learning plans must be developed for each student in cooperation with school personnel, students, and parents to identify long and short-range goals.

B. A broad range of curricula and co-curricular activities are available to all students providing opportunities for recognition and contribution. Co-curricular activities should be part of the student's plan and chosen to develop particular learning outcomes.

C. All students must be encouraged to develop creativity and the ability for higher order thinking.

D. Individual learning plans should attend to the appropriate integration of K-8 preparation and post-secondary needs of each student.

2. Multiple approaches are used to engage each student.

A. Learning extends beyond the traditional classroom to include the school system, community, and virtual realms.

B. Students are engaged with paid and unpaid learning activities in the community that link learning to real life expectations.

3. The school community is a welcoming environment.

A. All school personnel must treat students fairly, equitably, and with respect. In this way, each student is valued and will develop a respectful attitude towards others.

B. For learning to occur, schools must be safe and secure. Students feel safe because security is dealt with consistently and in an appropriate manner.

C. For the school community to be welcoming requires a concerted effort by all members of the community. Each school should develop guidelines for establishing a positive school climate and must pay particular and on-going attention to fostering that climate.

D. The school community must be inclusive…differences including gender, race, ethnicity, disability, religion, etc., must be valued and recognized as contributing to enhancing learning.

4. Professional development activities include enhancing the relationship between all educational professionals and students.

A. In addition to knowledge in their disciplinary subjects, teachers must continually develop skills in coaching, facilitating, and human relations.

B. All school personnel must have on-going training in the skills needed to foster an effective learning environment.

Characteristic C: All efforts are focused on a clear, powerful educational agenda.

1. Curriculum must focus on clearly defined student learning outcomes.

A. Curricula must be developed that provide appropriate challenges for all students, and must reflect high expectations. The basic assumption of schools must be that all students can learn and that school personnel are responsible for student learning.

B. For learning to occur, students must know what is expected of them, and they must be assessed based on those expectations. Thus, the curriculum must have clear objectives that are communicated clearly to all. Parents and community members must be knowledgeable about the learning objectives and must support those objectives.

C. In order to be meet individual student needs, the curriculum must be developed through an all-involving process that includes input from students, parents, and the community. Local school boards must retain control of the curriculum development process to insure that the community is involved and active in the schools.

D. High schools play a pivotal role between K-8 and post-secondary learning. Attention must be paid to aligning the high school curriculum with K-8 and post-secondary learning, producing a seamless educational system.

2. Curriculum must be responsive to individual students needs.

A. All adults must recognize the needs of individual students and be responsive to those needs. No student should "fall through the cracks."

B. To best meet the needs of individual students, curricula must be multi-faceted. All high schools must provide a critical mass of curricular alternatives for students. Depending on resources available in the community, alternatives could be provided locally or in collaboration with others, but they must be provided.

C. The most important result of education is the student learning outcomes. We must encourage flexibility in curriculum and method of delivery, as long as the desired learning outcomes are achieved.

D. For the deepest learning experience to occur, we must recognize that some learning outcomes are best achieved beyond the classroom. Such learning experiences occur in a context that cannot be recreated in the classroom.

E. Students and their families often know when the learning process is not as successful as it should be. Parents and students should be encouraged to seek help and support within the school, and school personnel should be responsive to individual needs.

3. Teachers must have the knowledge and skills to facilitate deep student learning.

A. Perhaps the most important component of an effective high school is highly competent teachers armed with the most effective knowledge and skills to facilitate deep learning. This requires excellent preparation in best practice for pre-service teachers and opportunities for practicing teachers to continue to hone their skills.

B. Such professional development must be on-going throughout a teacher's career, and schools must realize that continuing to develop their professionals in this way is a worthwhile investment.

C. In the last twenty years, a great deal has been learned through empirical research about the most effective strategies and methods for facilitating learning. All teachers must be well-trained in the most effective research-based methods.

D. All aspects of the school environment should be learner-centered. This requires that the recognition that the school environment should reflect and support learning and that continued attention be paid to maintaining such a focus.

E. For the schools to be learning communities, all members of the community must be engaged in learning. All school personnel need to learn about learning and be engaged in continuous improvement.

4. **All assessment should enhance student learning.**

   A. We must foster an assessment culture which demands an understanding of the assessment process and the proper use of data for continuous improvement of student learning.

   B. Assessments must be research-based, with the needed efficacy to be used for improvement.

   C. Assessments that provide data for accountability are necessary. Such data provide benchmarks and the necessary information to assure that programs are effective overall. We must recognize that all assessment should become part of the overall instructional process and not stand as a separate component. A proper balance is needed to ensure that instructional time is used as effectively as possible for student learning.

   D. Teachers, administration, school board, and community need to understand that assessment can improve student learning when used appropriately.

5. **Various barriers to a clear, powerful educational agenda should be addressed.**

   A. The need to compartmentalize curricula into Carnegie units fosters departmental "silos" within high schools that work against many of the principles advocated in the previous recommendations.

   B. High schools tend to be characterized by an entrenched culture that focuses on compartmentalization, seat time, and lecture-style learning. In part, this is driven by the predominance of such attributes in post-secondary education and the belief that high schools must prepare students for that learning environment.

   C. The predominant model of learning in high schools is perpetuated be secondary teacher preparation, where pre-service teachers become content specialists in their disciplines and rarely experience active learning methods in their major subject area.

   D. We must break down a culture of low expectations that impedes learning for minorities and learners from low socio-economic backgrounds.

   E. High school personnel must embrace change and reject excuses for maintaining the status quo.

Characteristic D: Students, staff, parents, and community share responsibility for student success.

All students can learn and everyone in the system (school, parents, community, teachers, and students) must take responsibility and be accountable for the learning.

    A. Teachers must be highly knowledgeable and qualified. Multiple opportunities for professional development are essential to ensure effective and innovative learning strategies.

    B. School change must include parental and community involvement in a variety of ways to meet classroom and community needs.

    C. Involvement requires a welcoming and non-threatening atmosphere.

    D. Avenues must exist for conversation among teachers, staff, parents, students, and communities to guarantee student success. Research concludes that such collaboration is not possible without system support.

Characteristic E Schools are engaged in dynamic, continuous improvement that is student focused.

1. Establish a systemic and systematic process for continuous improvement.

    A. The commitment and investment of school leaders, particularly the school principal, is essential in developing this process. Equally important is the involvement and engagement of the community, faculty/staff, and students.

    B. Educators and the community must monitor and be aware of external factors and opportunities that affect learning. The system needs to be responsive to changes in the local, state, and national communities.

    C. Schools need to review student success and other indicators of system implementation. Evidence should inform system modifications.

    D. Schools must evaluate resources available (human, facilities, financial, materials) and how those resources are presently utilized to assure that they are being used effectively. Further, schools must determine continuously determine how to direct the resources toward improving student success. Change can and must occur within the current resource base, and should not need to wait until additional resources are available.

E. Risk taking is fundamental to change, and monitoring of continuous improvement is critical to manage change in an acceptable way. A school community dedicated to improvement must have the confidence that change can be undertaken without disrupting essential delivery of effective education.

F. To ensure continuous improvement, assessment must be multi-faceted. School should seek and monitor student and community feedback concerning student progress.

2. **Provide technical assistance and support to help high schools engage in student-focused improvement.**

A. As a first step in implementing the model proposed in this report, schools must determine the current status of implementing the five characteristics. All appropriate entities should work collectively to lead the effort in performing this critical assessment.

B. A concerted effort must be made to ensure awareness of effective practices and strategies to implement each of the five characteristics.

C. The entire education system must focus on successfully implementing the strategies and approaches proposed in this report.

D. Review and evaluate progress regularly so modification can be made as necessary.

E. Engage the community (business, industry, parent organizations, youth organizations, faith community, and social services) in a meaningful way in this process.

Appendices

Appendix A

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Editorial: Iowa's choice: Change the trends

By Register Editorial Board, Des Moines Register

12/15/2002

In a few weeks, the 80th Iowa General Assembly will convene in freshly redecorated chambers. It will be the first new Legislature reflecting Iowa population shifts documented by the 2000 census.

These lawmakers have the opportunity to shape Iowa well into this new century. If past is prologue, however, the wrong decisions or a failure to make decisions will have consequences. Iowa's current demographic and economic landscape is surely the product of choices made in previous decades.

That landscape was outlined for a group of freshman lawmakers last week in a day-long session sponsored by Iowans for a Better Future, a group that wants to build on the work of the Governor's Strategic Planning Council.

It was a sobering image. It went beyond the oft-told tale of dismal demographic and business statistics. Former state economist Harvey Siegelman and ISU demographer Willis Goudy singled out some particularly disturbing numbers that isolate Iowa's problems and suggest the challenges that lie ahead.

* In the next decade, Iowa will need 567,000 new workers to replace retirees and to fill projected job growth. At current growth rates, Iowa will produce less than a third of the number needed. By 2020, Iowa is projected to actually lose working-age population.

* Iowa does a superb job training technically advanced workers, but it exports most of them. Iowa ranks No. 16 in the nation in science and engineering graduates but 37th in the number employed. In the first half of the 1980s alone, the loss of population due to outmigration was the equivalent of every single high-school graduate leaving the state.

* Iowa's companies are aging. Only one state has more companies over the age of 30 than Iowa. Iowa is 43rd in rapidly growing "gazelle" companies, and 50th in start-ups. "We traded vitality and growth for stability," Siegelman said, "and that cost us greatly."

* Iowa had the slowest population growth of any state in the Union during the 20th century. Most Iowa counties" populations peaked at least a half-century ago, and - except for a few urban areas - the downward trend continues. Yet, Iowa ranks near the top in the number of local-government employees per-capita and in property taxes, which uniquely discourage business growth.

Two business leaders and an educator were among those who offered perspectives.

David Lyons of the Iowa Farm Bureau: The new Legislature is taking charge of a business that is in debt, has disposed of all the easily sold assets, called in all its debts and leveraged all accounts receivable. Now leaders have to think beyond the immediate crisis and concentrate on the future. "You can't cut your way to prosperity."

Leonard Hadley, former CEO of Maytag: He went through at least four corporate restructurings in his career, and he said Iowa needs to do the same. Flying low over Iowa, as he often did, Hadley said he couldn't see school district, county or city borders, and it doesn't require a bulldozer to move them. "You have it in your power at the stroke of a pen to change that."

David England of Des Moines Area Community College: While everyone talks about skilled workers, Iowa does less to support its community colleges than other states; thus, tuition is 160 percent of the national average.

The message legislators should have derived from this is that Iowa is in its current fix because of choices made by their elected predecessors - things done, such as mindlessly courting industries that pay low wages, and things not done, such as paying attention to the amenities that make life richer and the state more attractive to young families.

If the Legislature does not begin to address the problems, they will get worse. As Siegelman said, quoting the Red Queen's comment to Alice - "in this place it takes all the running you can do, to keep in the same place" - Iowa will have to work hard just to maintain the status quo.

That won't be good enough. Iowa is going to have to run a lot harder and move ahead.

Credit the Iowans for a Better Future for getting that message out. All Iowans should help keep the message before state leaders as long as necessary.

Complete Promising Practices Information

TRENDS

It is immediately obvious when reviewing the interviews that there are a wide variety of strategies being used in high schools to facilitate student success, and many of these strategies are based on recognition of the importance of the student's complex social environment, including peer acceptance, involvement in school activities and parental involvement. Furthermore, each school is involved in multiple strategies simultaneously. Some have been in place for many years, while some are new innovations. Given the diverse and unique realities found across Iowa high schools, it is difficult to find a single formula that works in every situation; however, interviews reveal a number of commonalties that are delineated below.

Leadership. Strong, proactive, and collaborative leadership is needed to focus the energies of the entire school on strategies for student success. This involves maintaining those elements that work well and facilitating other initiatives that hold promise. Many good ideas come from and can be implemented by teachers and students. Administrators must support these efforts, as well as promote those required efforts, such as grade level testing. In general, successful school leaders care about teachers, students and student learning, and are able to use a variety of methods to focus the organization on student growth.

Teacher Involvement in Change. In the case of new innovations, a key component to success is teacher ownership (buy-in) in the process. When teachers are part of the change process, there is a much greater chance of success. This stands to reason since ultimately teachers have the most impact on student learning.

Change also involves professional development. Successful schools typically recognize this and provide adequate training for teachers.

Student Involvement in Problem-Solving and Change. When students realize they have a voice in the system, then they feel more ownership and are more involved. This includes identifying problems or challenges in the school, finding workable solutions, and involving students in the necessary changes. In some schools, climate *committees* or similar committees are formed to assist with development of an overall positive school climate.

Student Acceptance. An important element of student success in school is peer acceptance. Schools recognize this and have implemented various systems to ensure that students are comfortable in the school environment. This often begins in a student's freshman year by providing a school orientation and pairing new students with older students who act as a mentor. In some cases, junior high students are paired with high school students in order to establish relationships prior to high school. Formalized small grade level groups (e.g. homerooms) may also be formed in high school that stay intact throughout high school, thus providing a group with which students can identify.

Another facet of student acceptance is diversity. Elements are in place in some schools that support and promote acceptance of diversity among students. This includes student clubs focusing on diversity and committees in the school that promote and solve problems related to tolerance. This ultimately helps to ensure that all students are comfortable in the school environment. Student and teacher workshops are helpful to provide further knowledge and sensitivity related to diversity issues. Also, students may be encouraged to use differences as a topic for class assignments as appropriate.

Student Mentoring and Support. A student study skills program has met with success in several of the schools studied, apparently resulting in improved student achievement. Other schools have organized student support groups to address issues such as study skills, communications, etc. Training students and community volunteers as tutors to assist students that require extra help also provides student support.

Counselors provide essential assistance assist with a myriad of issues, such as student goal setting and personal and career development. This is another important type of student support.

Some schools identified block scheduling as a way to assist with student achievement. Students spend a longer period of time with each subject thus allowing them to go deeper into the subject matter and have more hands-on activities.

One school reports success with a program entitled "The Caring Connection." The overall goal is to boost student success in school and the community. This involves linkages to health services, community support for students, and mentoring across grade levels. It is an entire system based on recognition of the importance of support services for students.

Life Skills Development and Goal Setting. *Students have the responsibility of developing goals ancillary to academic achievement in many schools. This can involve character, citizenship, and career education. Goal setting in any of these areas typically will have academic ramifications as well.*

Portfolios are used in some schools to help students develop and monitor life and academic goals. Counselors are typically in charge of this activity, although others can serve just as well in this capacity. Frequent monitoring and updating of the portfolio ensures that it remains relevant over time.

Student Participation in Extracurricular and Co-curricular Activities. Educators realize that student participation in a variety of activities facilitates academic and life success. Extra and co-curricular activities provide opportunities for student success outside of the classroom and are important for a positive self-concept and individual recognition.

Some schools are highly proactive about promoting activity participation starting at the freshman level and try to help students understand how important this participation is to their overall success. In these types of schools, opportunities are available for all students to participate and gain recognition, not just a few highly talented students.

Carefully Tracking Student Progress and Providing Frequent Feedback. In order to ensure that students are on track academically, there needs to be frequent monitoring of achievement, and intervention as needed. School attendance is part of this tracking as well. In this way, students know that someone cares about their progress, and educators and students are alerted to the need for assistance before failure occurs.

One school reports that freshmen are sent grades and comments more frequently (every three weeks) than those in the upper classes. Students and parents are then quickly aware of the need for remediation.

In some schools, technology plays an important role by assisting with frequent feedback. For example, computer grading programs and the Internet are used to provide the frequent feedback needed to help students succeed. This information can easily be provided to parents as well.

Primary Caretaker Involvement. Successful schools attempt to involve parents or other primary caretakers early in the educational process. In many schools, enrollment for the school year requires

that students and parents meet with counselors so (that) there is familiarity and contact information as needed. This continues throughout high school.

Expectations of High Performance. Many schools have collaborated with stakeholders to clearly develop and implement mission and vision statements. In many cases, these statements have become working principles that clearly communicate district and community standards for student performance, such as quality producer, problem solver, democratic citizen, and etc.

At-Risk Student Support. Schools realize the complex factors that place some students at-risk for academic and/or social failure. Schools have sought creative ways to reach out to students facing challenging circumstances through increased mentoring, enhanced communication with parents/guardians, and efforts to increase engagement and interest of students in education. Other efforts include smaller class sizes, interdisciplinary and experiential instruction, and school/community partnerships.

Trends Summary

The trends identified through the interviews are consistent with best practices as identified in the literature. Student success requires a commitment and involvement by all the stakeholders in student achievement, and a consistent effort. The important elements are quality teaching, an environment that promotes student acceptance, involvement and high expectations, and support structures that facilitate student success. Most of the promising practices reinforce these fundamentals.

Complete Community Conversations

Iowa's High Schools: What is Their Future?

Results from the Community Conversations Component of the
        Reinventing High Schools Study Fall 2002

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I. Introduction
Concern over how to educate Iowa's high school students for a changing world and the recognition that change requires the best thinking of Iowa's citizens led to the community conversation component of the Reinventing High School study.

In January 2002, co-chairs Laurie Phelan and Jan Huss convened a Framing Team of business and civic leaders, and educators to develop a community discussion guide under the direction of consultant, Taylor L. Willingham. The Framing Team met twice and completed over 150 citizen interviews. The six interview questions were designed to harvest the concerns and points of pride Iowans feel about high school. Framing Team consolidated the citizen responses into three basic approaches to improving Iowa's high schools:

- ➢ Approach 1: Commit to Academic Performance
- ➢ Approach 2: Meet Needs; Make Connections
- ➢ Approach 3: Restructure and Reinvent

The consultant prepared a written document in a workbook format that citizens could use to not only guide their conversations, but to also note ideas and concerns that they heard expressed in their own forum. (Appendix B) The consultant wrote and narrated a script for a ten-minute videotape describing the three approaches. Iowa Public Television donated time and equipment to produce the tapes that were used to introduce the framing to forum participants who might not have read the discussion guide. The discussion materials and additional resources such as an Internet video stream of the video were made available at www.iafocusonhighschools.com. This site also invited the public to provide comments on a discussion board and provided updated information to the community about the other components of the study.

Area Education Agencies convened eighteen community forums across the state in the spring and fall of 2002, far exceeding the initial goal of 7-10 forums. Trained moderators led the discussions and volunteers recorded the comments of the participants. Participants also completed a survey and post forum questionnaire that gave them the opportunity to report *Comments Left Unsaid.*

This report incorporates information gleaned from:
- ➢ 150 citizen interviews

- ➢ 18 forums conducted from Spring – Fall 2002
- ➢ Comments posted on the web site
- ➢ Eleven moderator interviews
- ➢ Post forum questionnaires.

II. Executive Summary

The team members working on this project made gallant attempts to ensure that these community conversations were inclusive and encompassed the far reaches of the state. The participants in these forums do indeed represent a geographically diverse population, including voices from both the urban and rural communities. However, the moderators reported a lack of racial and ethnic and socioeconomic diversity. In addition, these forums only represent the thoughts of a segment of Iowa's population and should not be interpreted as a mandate from all citizens. Additional community conversations, a well-documented desire of the participants, would be advisable as Iowa moves forward in implementing changes designed to better meet the needs of Iowa's students in a changing world. Therefore, this report will focus on general themes rather than hard and fast findings.

1. Give every student his or her best possible chance to succeed. Cookie cutter education does not work for all. High standards may encourage some students to excel, but will leave too many students behind if they are universally applied without regard to the individual student's needs and capacity. Students face challenges that are different from those experienced in previous generations and require new solutions and resources.

2. Commit to building healthy, collaborative relationships between parents, students, teachers and the community. Connections and relationships (student to student; teacher to student; and community to school) are critical. These relationships include "get along skills" between students, the presence of a caring adult in the student's life and a healthy connection between the community and the school.

3. The educational agenda needs to be clearly defined and should be relevant, integrated and prepare students for life. Schools and teachers must be given the resources necessary to meet the educational agenda.

4. The current school structure may be outdated and in need of an overhaul. Participants had creative ideas about school size, the timing of the school day, structure of the day, and the length of time a student spends in school.

5. Participants are willing to embrace change with some caution. Participants overwhelmingly support change and want to be proactive in a changing world. However, they want to make sure that change does not include abandoning what is good about Iowa's high schools and that they have a voice in crafting the future.

6. Continue the community conversations and include voices that were missing from the first round of conversations. Participants were grateful for the opportunity to express their ideas and concerns and are enthusiastic about future opportunities to continue the conversations and include others who have not yet weighed in.

III. What Happened in the Forums

1. Give every student his or her best possible chance to succeed.

This common theme is first in this report to reflect the weight the participants gave to it. No matter what may have been left unsaid, in every forum, the participants at least came to the understanding that education must first be about the students. The description of this theme is carefully worded to note the focus on *every* student and the need for strategies to reflect what will best suit the individual

student. Like the high school students from Iowa who participated in the Youth2K summit, participants in these community conversations, agreed that "each student is unique, [that] the cookie cutter approach to education does not accommodate the needs of *all* students, and that it can inhibit students from reaching their full potential." [1]

"Losing kids" is not acceptable
While the participants expressed pride in Iowa's schools, they also expressed concern that the system may not be working for every student. *"Iowa has excellent schools and we do have one of the lowest drop-out rates in the nation. However, can we afford to allow 3000-4000 students drop out of high school each year in this state? I believe there are things we can do to improve schools for all students as well as address the needs of those who have dropped out."* (posted on web site)

In discussing the first approach, this theme revealed itself by what the participants cited as an unacceptable outcome. Participants saw merit in having high expectations of students and acknowledged the correlation between expectations and achievement. But they were unwilling to set the **same** expectations for all students if it would cause some students to be squeezed out of the system. Participants acknowledged that kids learn differently and at different rates and that *"we'll lose some kids with a totally academic approach."* While there was overwhelming support for providing individual attention to young people, it was also tempered with the realization that this approach requires substantial commitment of time and resources.

They were also concerned that the first approach would lead to tracking and that *"students might be "eliminated" and sent on an academic/vocational track before the "light bulb" has gone on."* They adamantly rejected the idea of tracking and in a number of forums the example of the European model was soundly criticized.

Another related concern was that "average" high school students are not getting enough attention. One participant stated that low and high performing students get most of the attention, while "C" students receive very little attention and direction.

Consider life outside of high school
Concern for the students' life outside of high school was most strongly expressed in the citizen research interviews. When asked what concerned them about Iowa's High Schools, citizens cited suicide, violence, safety, drugs, depression, eating disorders, students being picked on by their peers, dropouts, alienation, and lack of tolerance. In one forum, the opening comments centered on concern over high dropout rates stemming from diverse cultural backgrounds and poverty, and the impact of rising minority enrollment rates. *"Students today have much more emotional baggage and many more "issues" than kids in the past. Unfortunately, there's not enough professional counseling and health support available for students."* Participants commented that the challenges of today are different from those experienced in previous generations and will require new solutions and resources. *"I think the challenges are increasing and the solutions are becoming increasingly complex."*

Students come from homes that may or may not value education and may or may not have the resources to fully support the student's education. *"Some of these students do not get the proper family support and they look to their peers to find their purpose and family support"* and from another participant, *"When parents give time and love, those kids succeed. More parents must model that education is important."*

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[1] Recommendation #1: Teach All Learners. Youth Position Paper (draft) Positions and Recommendations Presented by Youth at the Youth 2K Youth Summit on Learning and Community Involvement, July 7-9, 2000, Kansas City, KS.

These changing circumstances have impacted the school in profound ways forcing the school to fill multiple roles with limited resources. As one interviewee noted, *"…the schools have become substitute parents for many students; schools are places where students must learn elements of life not taught at home."*

2. Commit to building healthy, collaborative relationships between parents, students, teachers and the community.
This theme was strongly represented in the forums, the interviews and on the web site. Regarding teachers, participants said, —*"Students don't care what you know until they know you care."* Of students, they noted, *"More people fail because of relationships—over 90%--[it is a] critical issue."* Iowans value relationships and connections, and are distressed that these relationships do not currently reflect their ideal.

Relationships within the school
When asked what they remember about high school, several interviewees spoke of the social aspects of high school. For some, the question evoked memories of dances, meeting new friends, sport events and membership in clubs and organizations. Others described high school as a place *"where many students are struggling academically, socially and psychologically,"* a place where *"young people try to fit in and be accepted."* In the words of another interviewee, *"It's important to establish relationships socially and professionally so kids are active and doing things for their future."* Unfortunately, as one interviewee noted, *"Kids [are] not accepted because they're different – black, disabled – and it's not just the kids, it's the teachers."*

A weakness that participants noted in the first approach was that *"students still need to know how to function in society and social situations, not just academics."* Not surprisingly, the second approach held some appeal precisely because it would help students learn "get along" skills, skills that will prepare them for life and work. One person strongly advocated, "*Relationship skills have to happen before a student can learn."*

One recurring theme that may be related to "get along" skills is the concern about a lack of discipline and behavioral problems that interfere with learning. Another example of deteriorating relationships was described as a lack of respect. Interestingly, there were examples of this lack of respect cutting across all groups – teacher's lacking respect for students and parents, and parents and students lacking respect for teachers. While these concerns were countered with examples of caring teachers who serve as mentors and role models, supportive and involved parents, and bright, talented young people, there were ample comments regarding the need to invigorate discipline and renew respect to warrant additional consideration.

The importance of healthy collaborative relationships was also evident in the responses to the interview question about who needs to be involved in improving Iowa's high schools. Responses typically involved a long list that basically amounted to "everyone" but the response of one participant who elaborated on this question highlights the importance of involving students and parents in a collaborative relationship with the schools. *"The students and their parents need to take ownership of the educational system. They need to buy into education as a necessary tool for their futures."* One participant was even willing to make parental involvement a requirement. (No implementation plan was offered!)

Perhaps some of the most provocative comments came from interviews with eleven students in an alternative high school. The main points reported by the interviewer were that students do not feel safe, they do not get enough individual help and they are not listened to. For them, high school was a place for "bullying and intimidation." They noted that the alternative setting allowed them to go at their own pace.

The impetus to examine the issue of relationships within the school is even more critical if, as one person suggested, *"The single most important characteristic will always be skilled, caring and motivated staff and administrators."*

Community/school relationships
When discussing the second and third approaches, one of the attractions cited repeatedly was the increased role for the community. Participants noted *"schools are at an advantage with community coming in"*.

The overwhelming support for more community involvement did not merely focus on what the community could do for the school; healthy community connections were also seen as key to making learning relevant and a strategy for connecting kids to their communities, making them more likely to stay or return home after college.

Several interviews revealed a concern that student do not have much awareness of the community and do not see themselves as part of the community. One interviewee stated, *"Schools are self-centered and don't see themselves as part of the community. Teachers aren't encouraged (or given the support to be part of the community so they don't demonstrate that to the students."*

Participants identified a number of strategies, including curriculum embedded in community problems, service learning, and local leaders in educative/mentoring roles. They cited increased access to community resources, greater support for funding, and students who choose to remain in or return to community after graduation as potential outcomes of a healthy school to community connection.

3. The educational agenda needs to be clearly defined and should be relevant, integrated and prepare students for life. Schools and teachers must be given the resources necessary to meet the educational agenda.

Clearly defined agenda
It is not surprising that a conversation on how high school should respond to a changing world would eventually circle back and ask fundamental questions, *"What is the purpose of education?" "What are we educating our students for?" "What is the purpose of high school?"*

As one participant stated, *"We need to come to some agreement that learning is the focus on what we do in schools. If not, schools shouldn't exist."* But this statement does not answer the questions about what is to be learned, and how learning is to be evaluated, issues that are yet unresolved.

Some of the themes related to the educational agenda may, however, offer insight into what the public values in a high school education. Phrases like *relevant*, *meaningful*, *integrated*, *life-long learning*, *preparation for life*, and *well rounded* were frequently noted in the community conversations. Essentially participants were calling for an educational agenda that prepares each and every student for life. There was enthusiasm about individualized learning plans that expand the opportunities for students to pursue education in a variety of ways, but concerns about how practical it would be given the current funding climate.

There were passionate calls for strategies that teach students to think.

> ➢ Teach students to think: We teach them to sharpen a pencil, but we don't teach them why.
> ➢ *Want students to become better thinkers, problem-solvers better citizens, thus… create a better future for all of us*
> ➢ "One administrator made the statement 'Do you want us to make nurses or thinkers?'…Great statement" *(post forum survey)*

The issue of grades, and the impact that grades have on a student's course selection was noted in some of the forums. There was concern that the push for good grades is an incentive for kids to take easy classes. They considered alternatives – pass/fail but did not come to a resolution.

Integrated with life before high school
Participants strongly support a comprehensive look at high school that recognizes education does not take place in a vacuum. They called for all parts of the educational system to be linked into a continuum of opportunity and emphasized that interventions need to include early childhood through high school, not just high school. Students come to high school a product of their earlier education experiences. Several participants commented that no conversation about reinventing high school should take place without first considering how prepared the students are when they enter high school. Several participants questioned why the conversation was focused only on high schools. *"We're not going to fix kids at high school level—need to start much earlier."*

There was a sense that any "tweaks" or changes to the high school experience must also consider what would need to change in preceding years to prepare students for high school.

Connected with life after high school
Participants also wanted to see more emphasis on connecting students to opportunities beyond high school whether it is college or the world of work. Some participants were even concerned about whether or not students were getting adequate information about their post-high school options. *"There may be resources, but there is a sense that students are not being exposed to the range of options they may have for their lives."*

Several participants also looked ahead to the higher education environment and speculated what could be/should be done to better prepare students for yet another system of education. In talking about the link between high school and higher education, participants called for clearer communication between institutions, particularly if high school is dramatically restructured as proposed by the third approach. They wanted reassurances that community colleges and universities would participate in crafting graduation standards so that students would be ready for the rigors of higher education.

There was a particular interest in ensuring that high school students have opportunities to participate in the world of work as part of their formal education and that their tenure in the work world would be connected to their education. One interviewee called for students to *have the chance to spend time in places where they might want to be employed, whether it be a garage, a college, or a fire station, but the work sites they go to should be quality…some place where there is a positive model of what they want to be. There needs to be a lot more communication between school and the world after school."*

Funding
The common question that cut across all discussions and showed up in all three approaches was *"How will we finance this?"* While delighted to be engaged in this conversation, many participants questioned the state's ability to follow through on any action that would require funding, a pre-requisite to implementing any of the three approaches. *"I am glad they (IA) are rethinking high school, but state and legislature must provide adequate fundraising.*

The moderator of one forum described the tension around funding as being based on philosophical differences about taxation. While some of the participants stated that they were taxed enough and would not be willing to pay more, others seemed willing to pay more if they were shown what was needed. However, they did not feel compelled to pay any more for general school finance and did not even see a need in spite of budget cuts. Those who were willing to support additional funding did so with a caution that the schools have to prove a need first. In addition to demonstrating the need,

participants wanted reassurance that the policy-makers would, *prove to taxpayers that what you say you will do - YOU WILL DO!*

 "The bottom line is funding. Will the funding be there for any changes that may be made to improve the school system?"

As a contrast, however, participants in another forum recognized that resources are short, but made strong comments that education is a priority and "we should be looking for resources!" As frequently happens in community conversations, the participants slipped into a form of denial that "we can have it all" but when the moderator reminded the participants of scarce resources, they began exploring ways to get creative and move beyond public funding.

Teacher pay and evaluation
Participants recognized that teachers will bear the burden of much of the possible changes in the educational agenda and will require support and staff development. While not a rousing cry, there were calls for increased salary and for raises to be based on merit and not automatic.

While several participants praised the quality of teachers, there were indications that not everyone shares this sentiment. Some participants referred to incompetent, uncaring teachers and called for better evaluation tools and mechanisms to remove incompetent teachers. *"Administrators need to be responsible for terminating teachers who are not performing."* One participant posited that it is very difficult to remove a poor teacher and that the tenure track should be eliminated.

4. The current school structure may be outdated and in need of an overhaul

School size and re-organization
The issue of school size led to lively conversations in many forums. On the one hand participants felt that larger schools had more resources, but one principal from a smaller school pointed out that smaller schools just find creative ways to replicate the advantages of a larger school. While participants felt that smaller schools are better able to meet the emotional needs of the students, they were also concerned about the distribution of resources. They also felt that many of Iowa's high schools are *"too small to be all things to all people."* Smaller schools were cited as being unable to offer a broad range of courses. Some participants supported the idea of "relocating students" to schools and felt that this practice would lead to "better sharing of resources." In one forum these were described as Centers or specialty schools. Some participants suggested regional high schools or specialty/magnet schools where the choice of school would be based on the needs of the student. Participants also supported an expanded use of technology as a means of delivering instruction and overcoming the disadvantages faced by smaller schools with limited resources. The delicate balance participants wanted was for high schools to be *"large enough to offer quality programs at an affordable cost, but not so large that students fall through the cracks."*

The issue of school reorganization was not the lightning rod that most moderators expected, perhaps because it was not explicitly proposed in the discussion guide and not perceived to be under consideration in the forum. It did, however, come up as participants speculated on methods of implementing the third approach. One moderator stated that he did not sense a tension about organization or re-organization and did not hear a voice that said, *"Don't reorganize"*. The most passionate comments about school reorganization were not advocating a particular position, but calling for leadership and vision as noted in this comment from a school superintendent, *"For Goodness take some leadership and some responsibility – make a decision and stick to it. The issue of finance and school re-organization requires statewide leadership. Get them consolidated into larger groups and let us get on with running the school."* The moderator clarified, *"There is a willingness to support school consolidation, a willingness to get over the divisions if state will allow it and support it."* (*moderator paraphrase.) In discussing school consolidation one participant commented, "Make*

decisions. Instead of 400+ districts fighting among selves, DE MUST say this is the vision - this is what we're going to do. Don't let districts bleed to death.

Structure of the day
The need to match the school day to the "teenage biological clock" came up a surprising number of times. Participants proposed that later start times would increase education effectiveness because the students would be more alert and rested.

Block schedules were proposed in a couple of forums, but one forum stated that research shows it isn't working. In the early meetings with the Framing Team, one teacher lamented that the current fifty-minute blocks of time he has to conduct his class severely restrict his opportunities to be creative. Participants called for more flexible scheduling options for students and teachers.

Duration
There was widespread interest in eliminating Carnegie units. Even in a forum where Carnegie units did not appear to be an important part of the discussion, the moderator stated that it was because so many of the kids in that community graduate with more than they need. In many forums, participants questioned whether or not it really takes *everyone* four years to meet graduation requirements. They speculated about the possibility that students could graduate whenever they have mastered some pre-determined requirements, even if it meant graduating mid-year or in their junior year. Participants did note some potentially prohibitive factors. Obviously, this would represent a major overhaul to the system that would require significant resources to develop and time to implement. Participants were concerned about the impact on the socialization that takes place in high school if students do not move through as a group and celebrate the culmination of their education together. Of course, this approach obvious questions about how school sports would be affected. The jury is still out on the value of extracurricular activities, particularly school-sponsored sports, but it is clearly an issue on which people are strongly divided and will not be resolved easily.

Three months off in the summer:
As noted earlier, there was a lack of student representation in the forums so the recommendation to consider year round school may not have the broadest support when unveiled! However, a number of participants questioned the wisdom of adhering to a "paradigm of 180 days." According to more than one person, schools are *"stuck in the outdated, farm community mentality."* The advantage to a year round school was that it would decrease the time it takes to recoup skills kids now lose over the summer. Other consideration was given to making summer employment part of the education experience, to give students credit for what they learn on the job and to engage employers as fellow educators.

Extracurricular activities
As noted earlier, there was no clear theme regarding the role of extracurricular activities. Some see them as a way to increase retention, teach students valuable socialization and team skills that are valued by employers while others felt that *"extracurriculars need to lighten up."* Interviewees saw a tension between the time and energy students spend on academics vs. extracurricular activities – specifically sports. They questioned, *"Do extracurricular activities teach life skills?"* They further noted, *"Kids have too much going on – high stress period. Adults wouldn't keep the schedule kids keep."* To the extent that extracurricular activities keep students engaged and give them an opportunity to develop their talents, participants would be supportive, but there was not a resounding endorsement of that premise by everyone.

5. Participants were willing to embrace change with some caution.

The most common response when moderators were asked what surprised them about the community conversations was the participants' willingness to consider new and innovative approaches to high

school. One moderator, who described the participants in her forum as "professional educators", was surprised that they were *"willing to scrap the system and to try new things"* consistent with the third approach. However, she wondered aloud if that willingness would hold if they were *really* moved to change. She elaborated, *"My experience is that, as a group, teachers are more resistant. Change is even threatening to the innovative teachers because it might mean that they have to change what they are doing."* (paraphrased) Even participants one moderator described as having a low to moderate tolerance for risk, stated a willingness to make changes provided they were involved and informed about "what's going on." This idea that people are willing to change provided they are part of the conversation in reflected in the common ground statement from one group. *"Everyone needs to be in-tune and competent with the changes that will occur."*

When some participants talked about the need for change, there seemed to be a sense of urgency, but their reasons were general and did not seem motivated by a perception that there is a crisis or a problem demanding immediate attention. Often change is deferred until conditions become so unbearable or unacceptable that plunging into the frightening unknown has greater appeal than maintaining the current conditions. It is remarkable to note that many of the participants carefully considered and even embraced some rather dramatic changes *without* the presence of a crisis. Many of them claimed that they are pleased with their schools. They described them as good followed confidently with, *"but they can get better."* Their reasons for change were equally matter-of-fact. *"Times are changing – we need to adapt."*

In one forum, the willingness to consider change was documented as the common ground that represented the thoughts of the entire group. According to the flip chart notes, this group agreed:

> ➢ *We are amenable to change.*
> ➢ *We need to be preparing people for the future*
> ➢ *We believe change is needed and it is difficult*

This is not to say that the participants are calling for wholesale change, just for the sake of change. Cautionary comments indicate that participants want to make sure that there are adequate resources and that new ideas receive adequate time to implement. They want assurance that the *"baby won't be thrown out with the bathwater,"* reflecting the idea that there is much to cherish about their schools. Even in cases where there was enthusiasm for dramatic changes, there was also an emphasis on evaluating and monitoring the effect. Another strong desire was that change should be based on sound research, but not such that innovation would be paralyzed by a lack of research. While some were concerned about going too far too fast, others, who referred to the current models as outdated, espoused the need for new thinking.

Perhaps the best description of this tension is an illustration of how participants readily supported innovation, but rejected experimentation. In one forum, participants were imagining non-traditional high school models and the forum was becoming a creative-fest when one mother intervened, uncomfortable with the thought that her daughter's education would become a grand and perhaps disastrous experiment. Later in that same forum, a participant mused, *"We are trying to fix the plane while we are in mid-air."* The distinction between "innovation" and "experimentation" is not clear from the forums, but is certainly worthy of further exploration. Perhaps innovation is seen as a valuable strategy to reach students and prepare them for a changing world, while the clinical feel of "experimentation" flies in the face of the participants' focus on serving all young people according to their needs.

A posting on the web site almost seems to challenge policy-makers to be innovative and open to new ideas. "I'm curious to see if the committee is interested in "patching" what some will say is an outdated system, or if they are interested in true reform. Are they willing to look at school calendars, time and

length of day, revamping the curriculum, etc.? How far 'out of the box' are they willing to go?" (posted on web)

6. Continue the community conversations and include voices that were missing from the first round of conversations.

Forum participants and contributors to the web site expressed a strong desire to know that their comments are being heard. They were willing to talk and to engage with the approaches in a thoughtful and deliberative manner even when they resisted a perspective. They also recognized the need to continue talking and to make the conversations more inclusive of diverse opinions and voices. Several participants lamented the lack of time to fully sort through the issue within the two-hour forum format.

In several forums, the participants talked about the importance of being invited to the table and of having an authentic role. In the words of one participant, *"I appreciated having the opportunity to voice some ideas & having a state board of education person listen!"* (post forum questionnaire) Unfortunately a two-hour forum is rarely enough time to even begin a conversation, particularly one that is so large and complex, and the participants expressed their frustration about the time frame. *"The group & forum were excellent – too short of a time period.*

In addition to the frustration over the time constraints, participants were also concerned about the voices that were missing in the community conversations. At one point someone said*, "It's going to take a lot of people, a lot of citizens, not just a few administrators."* (interview with a moderator) One forum noted the need for legislators to be involved in the conversations.

Students, whose vested interest in these conversations is obvious, were notably absent from the conversations. Two students attended one forum and one participated in another, but according to the moderators, their participation was minimal and, in one case, the student left early. *"I would like to reiterate the importance of getting student feedback on this topic, when adults discuss student issues we need to keep the idea of 'What's best for students' in mind?"* The team that conducted the interviews to frame the discussion made a concerted effort to include students, particularly students for whom the system has not been effective. The interviewer who completed eleven interviews with alternative high school students confirmed the importance of including their voices when he noted that a common theme from the interviews was the students' belief that they have useful ideas about what it takes to "make schools work". Effective businesses seek to understand why potential customers do not use their product. The lesson for education is that students who do not fit into the system have a unique and valuable vantage point.

Even moderators who felt like the participants in their forum represented diverse professions conceded that they did not feel as though the forum reflected the "whole realm of socioeconomic classes". The moderators also commonly reported a lack of ethnic representation. One moderator who was particularly passionate about reaching beyond the "usual suspects" had this to say. *"There doesn't need to be more money [to hold forums], [we] just need forums that reach out to those who feel disenfranchised, but have the most to offer. When they participate, that's when you get the feedback you really need to hear – low income or immigrant – not the yuppie-type parents who know how to go directly to the superintendent to get it resolved."*

The participants were not only willing to continue the conversation and to engage others, they had concrete ideas on how to use the conversation to set policy. *"I would hope that the State Board take this input- define and refine it and hold a second round of half a day long conversations for input and then take the info to make their decisions or develop a plan for state."*

XXIII

For some participants, however, the enthusiasm about the community conversations was tempered by a feeling of powerlessness and cynicism. Some participants felt that a lack of resources made the conversations moot while others expressed concern that the conversations were yet another idle exercise. The concern about resources will be discussed more fully later in this report. However, it is important to note that this perception might have affected the tenor of the conversation for some. *"I don't know why these forums are being held when there are no resources available for restructuring and state and federal legislation limit any flexibility."* Cynicism was evident in the concern that *"this is just talk"* and through comments like, *"I've been through this before. How many times are we going to go through this?"*

Despite an undercurrent of powerlessness and cynicism and the concern that too many voices were missing from the conversation, the majority of comments about the community conversations were positive and participants want to continue the conversations. There are several advantages to this strategy. First it is one way to directly address the concerns about the process expressed by the participants. Secondly it addresses another issue the participants brought to the conversation – their desire to remain involved in the conversation was a condition under which they would support and embrace change.

Several moderators reported being impressed with the quality of comments and the fact that so many people had good background knowledge and a strong level of commitment and insight. Another moderator commented on the positive level of discussion and marveled that so many people with excellent viewpoints were willing to talk. This moderator was further impressed with the strong level of insight from the group. Perhaps, as one participant noted, *"[The] State board needs to take information and keep the conversation going with us."*

IV. Summary of the Community Conversation About the Approaches

One of the concerns of the Framing Team was that approaches that were too narrowly defined would not allow for creative, open-ended conversations about new models. However, in order to frame a discussion guide that drives a deliberative conversation about the merits and drawbacks of each approach, a certain amount of definition about the approach is necessary to illustrate the possible actions that an approach would support. Otherwise, the conversation simply becomes a place for wishful thinking or brainstorming where participants are not pushed to confront difficult trade-offs and consequences of their decisions. The framework helps contain the issue so that participants can focus on the core values and common ground upon which acceptable courses of action can be launched.

In order to resolve the tension between the desire to reap creative ideas from the community conversations while staying true to the principles of a deliberative framework, the approaches contain a certain level of ambiguity – a space where the participants could fill in the gaps. Of the three approaches, the third was the least clearly defined. Moderators noted that it was also produced the liveliest moments in the conversations. Participants did not allow the conversation to drift into wishful thinking perhaps because they were attuned at that point in the forum to the pattern of deliberation - consider an approach or action, imagine the outcomes. What is acceptable or palatable based on what we value, and what is unacceptable? This approach was the blank slate upon which participants could freely explore possibilities, including combinations of the first two approaches, and the ramifications of different actions never before considered. Greater attention is given to it in this report as a result. The reader should remember that none of the opinions expressed in this report constitute a mandate from the citizens – the sample is simply too small and lacks demographic representation. However, the themes presented in this report and the tensions expressed in the approaches present valuable starting points for future conversation and some concerns to consider in future policy.

Approach 1:

The strongest concern with the first approach was whether or not it could meet the needs of the individual student. This was not only expressed by the parents, but also by the educators.

There was a strong feeling that participants want some standards, but they are unwilling to impose standards that could not be adjusted according to an individual student's needs. There is support for the idea, but caution that it should not be implemented in a way that squeezes some students out. At the same time, participants did not want standards to become the ceiling. They were concerned that a standard set at a level everyone could reach might result in complacency even among students capable of exceeding the minimum standards.

There was a split as to whether or not this approach would meet the needs of the employers. On the one hand participants saw the possibility that this approach could guarantee an employee with a certain level of education and knowledge, but there was concern that this commitment to academic excellence does not take into account that the workforce does not need people who can do quantum physics. Participants questioned whether this approach responded to the contemporary environment. In one forum, they felt that those who support this approach are romanticizing the past.

Approach 2:

The primary attraction that approach 2 held for the participants was the value that it places on the student and the student's needs. Participants embraced the idea that all students would be valued and that school would be a welcoming place for young people and for the community. Participants recognized that education cannot ignore the home and community life of the students. During our interviews to prepare the community discussion guide, citizens lamented that students often enter into the educational environment with a multitude of problems. They talked of the impact that a poor home life has on the student's ability to be successful.

Participants also spoke passionately about the importance of healthy relationships. In several forums, participants asserted that healthy relationships are a prerequisite to learning. One forum participant said, *"Focusing on relationships helps kids find their potential. Right techniques won't necessarily engage students."*

The idea of individualized learning and methods that allow for different learning styles resonated with many of the participants. They felt that a promising outcome of this approach might be increased retention, especially retention of minority and "disenchanted" students.

This approach elicited a strong sense that the community cares about youth and wants to strengthen the connection with the students. They spoke of the advantage to both the student and the community from a stronger connection. One participant called for a stronger sense of community and the importance of a caring atmosphere. Another participant noted, *"What people in community see in student is important."* In one forum, the moderator reported that participants gravitated toward the idea of service learning. Service learning was praised as a means to *"provide students with a higher level of learning, to expand on their basic knowledge"* and to *"connect learning with real life."* While there were questions from some participants about how academics fit this approach, service learning was not seen as conflicting with high-level academics, but as a means of making learning relevant. A thoughtful response to one participant's *"need [for a] clear definition of service learning"* and another participant's call for standards for high quality service learning could address the concern about whether or not service learning can be effectively combined with the academic focus of the first approach.

Approach 3:

Words that describe the appeal of the third approach include "innovative", "flexible", and "creative". In some forums, this approach was embraced enthusiastically. Several participants described this as the *"think outside of the box"* approach or as one participant noted *"change is not easy; must get out of the box!!"*

In one forum, participants saw that while this approach would be challenging for teachers, it would also be more exciting and would let the teachers be creative. One moderator reported that educators felt this would be a wonderful opportunity that it would be exciting to experiment, but that they feel suppressed and frustrated by lack of community support. The educators in the forum also reported that their ability to be creative is hindered by the expectations they have to meet and by "huge paperwork loads". Participants in other forums were also attracted to the flexibility and freedom that the teachers would have. At the same time they were cautious and expressed a concern about teacher quality and burnout.

Flexibility was seen as a positive outcome for the students. Several forums reported that this approach would meet the needs of the students by providing them with richer experiences and helping even the *"least qualified student find a place in society."* They cited the ability to reach students who do not learn in traditional ways as an advantage of this approach. They also cautioned, however, that some students need structure.

The increased role of the student was seen as another positive outcome of this approach. Participants want to *"give students more of a voice – more power in creating their destiny."* The increased student investment was linked to greater intrinsic motivation.

Participants felt that this approach offered students would have more options. Participants were enthusiastic about the idea that students could progress at their own pace and have opportunities to explore their own talents. *"Kids could work at their own pace get to proficiency and move on."* They were particularly interested in changing seat time requirements. This was evident in more than half of the forums, the post-forum survey and in interviews with the moderators. As one participant said, *"Get rid of Carnegie units – move to content knowledge."*

Much of the resistance to this approach was not because the participants rejected it, but because they did not believe that it would happen and because implementation would be difficult. In one forum, the started the conversation with *"We'll pretend this could happen."* As one moderator reported, participants essentially said, *"wouldn't it be nice, but it will never happen."* Participants also noted that coordination would be difficult, the community might not step up to the plate, and this approach might end up being the "flavor of the month". As one participant stated, *"I would like to get excited but when programs are always coming and going, it is hard to get excited."* Expressed a slightly different way in another forum, *"Creative initiatives have been tried and failed – lack of implementation and inability to stick with it long enough to see a change."* They were also skeptical about how much the community would/could be involved and whether or not it would be possible to get consensus on what should be done.

There was also understandable concern about walking on untested ground. On the one hand participants were intrigued by the possibility of something innovative and forward thinking, but they also saw experimentation as being risky and difficult to sell to the community. One participant noted, *"Parents want(ing) us to think outside the box, but at same time – want tradition."* One forum reported that this approach would require the public to be educated because this approach would create high schools unlike *"the high school we grew up with."*

The participant's aversion to the widespread change suggested by this approach was strongly rooted in the question of how performance would be measured. Several participants were willing to be innovative, but also wanted to be able to monitor the effects of change. They asked, *"How do we know this will work?"* Evaluation and accountability were frequently cited concerns. And yet, some participants saw that this approach offered an opportunity to implement an evaluation based on performance, outcomes/results, and "learning" and knowledge rather than seat time. The question *"Is there an appropriate way to measure this new way of doing business?"* will have to be answered in order to mitigate the risky or experimental nature of this approach.

There were several lively discussions about the impact this approach would have on extracurricular activities, particularly organized sports. Some saw that a move to community-organized sports would be positive while participants in another forum warned about "little league syndrome" and the kids whose families may not have the resources to support their involvement in "club" activities.

The issue of limited resources was a concern in all three approaches and expressed in every forum. However, the discussion of resources took an interesting turn in a couple of forums when the participants discussed the third approach. Rather than seeing this approach as requiring additional resources, participants saw it as a means to make creative and effective use of existing resources.

Another important theme that emerged in discussing approach 3 was the use of technology. Some forums focused on the community connections suggested by this approach and barely touched on the use of technology while other forums focused on the benefits of online learning, even suggesting that maybe students could take 50% of their credit online. Again, participants voiced support for changing the seat time requirements. One participant suggested that online learning would enable students to finish high school in three years or less. Even in the forum that most enthusiastically endorsed online learning, there was a caution that relationships are still key to the kind of education they want for their kids, that there is value in face to face interaction with the teacher.

Interview questions for Iowa High School Issue Framing Team
Comments due to Taylor by February 8, 2002
Please bring your responses to the issue framing team meeting on February 12-13, 2002

1. What are the first words that come to mind when I say "high school"?

2. What are your impressions/thoughts about how things are going in today's high schools in Iowa?

3. What concerns you about Iowa's high schools?

    a. What makes this important to you?

4. What is hopeful/promising about what is going on in Iowa high schools?

    a. What makes this important to you?

5. Who needs to be involved in improving Iowa's high schools?

6. If you could design the future Iowa high school, what characteristics would you want to see?

Community Discussion Guide

Introduction

When it comes to education, Iowans can point to many factors with pride. Since 1989, Iowa has ranked no lower than third among states that use the ACT as the primary college exam. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, Iowa had the third lowest dropout rate in the nation for grade 9-12 in both 1996-97 and 1997-98, a rate that has steadily dropped since 1985.

But many Iowans feel that both challenges and opportunities loom on the horizon. This is a pivotal point in the history of education. The tools and opportunities for learning have changed in this 24/7 world. Technological change is happening at a dizzying pace and an increasingly global economy creates added pressure on our educational system. At the same time, fundamental questions abound concerning the social context for school. The changing demographics of Iowa, and the increasing demands on our schools at a time of decreasing resources are just a few other conditions pressing Iowans to consider what should be done to prepare Iowa's high school students for the future.

On April 17-18, 2001, over 150 Iowans began a process of evaluating and recommending ways to improve high schools. Governor Vilsack launched the forum challenging participants to focus on improvements in Iowa's schools that will assure our youth receive first-class preparation for the future. When asked if Iowa's high schools need to change, the participants rallied with a resounding YES! But the questions of *what* should change and *how* it should change pose a thorny challenge – a challenge that requires the best thinking from all Iowans.

In January 2002 a group of concerned citizens took on the challenge of finding out what their fellow Iowans think about high schools in Iowa and what changes they feel are important to ensuring the success of high school-age students. These concerned citizens fanned out across the state and interviewed hundreds of fellow Iowans. The interviewers conscientiously sought out diverse ideas and experiences in order to craft a discussion guide that authentically captures what Iowans value about their high schools, the concerns that they have, and their ideas on how high schools can be changed in order to prepare students for the future.

The ideas, concerns and recommendations of more than 150 Iowans are expressed in this discussion guide as three basic approaches, according to a set of values or a particular perspective. The goal of this discussion is not to select one particular approach over another, but to facilitate a focused conversation on each of the approaches and to stimulate new ideas.

The three approaches we will examine in our discussion are:

Approach 1 says that we should commit to academic performance and maintain high expectations for all students. Math, science, technology and communication are the critical foundation that all students need to be successful and all students must be expected to reach a certain level of competency.

Approach 2 says that the best way to prepare young people for the future is to accommodate multiple approaches to learning and teaching, to connect kids with meaningful work through service learning, and to help young people learn to get along and find strength in difference.

Approach 3 says that it is time to rethink the fundamental structure of high schools. Bold thinking and imagination are required to prepare students for the future. Schools must strengthen leadership and distribute responsibility beyond the school walls.

Each approach has merit; each approach has potential trade-offs or pitfalls. Your task is to determine what each approach might look like in high schools across Iowa and how the approaches could be melded into a course of action that *all* Iowans will be willing to embrace and support.

Introduction questions to stimulate your thinking

As you begin your discussion, it might be useful to consider the following questions:

What are the first words that come to mind when you think about "high school"?

What are your impressions or thoughts about how things are going in today's high schools in Iowa?

What concerns you about Iowa's high schools?

What is hopeful or promising about what is going on in Iowa's high schools?

Approach 1: Commit to Academic Performance

Supporters of this approach fear that high schools have lost - or at least diluted - the focus on academic performance. Students are not spending enough time in school and weak course work hinders students as they move into the world of work or post-secondary education. Supporters of this choice worry that some students graduate without taking solid academic courses. They also express concern that some students are spread too thin and academics are not at the heart of their high school experience

Although Iowa scores well compared to other states, the U.S. is losing ground – an alarming trend in a global economy. For example, eleventh-graders in the U.S. are studying the science content taught to ninth-graders in other countries. Seventh-graders in other countries have already completed the math content that U.S. students don't tackle until the ninth-grade. Even more alarming, the relative performance of high school students plummets between the early years and high school. The performance of U.S. fourth graders in science is second in the world, but by the twelfth grade, the U.S. rank drops to third from the bottom, outperforming only Cyprus and South Africa. Supporters of this choice say that now is not the time to let Iowa's success lull us into complacency.

Math, science, technology and communication are the critical foundation that all students need to be successful and all students must be expected to reach a certain level of competency. In addition, we need to recognize the emerging role of technology both as a tool for teaching and as a skill to be taught. Technology can make previously inaccessible academic content widely available.

What could be done?

High school should emphasize an academic knowledge base and uphold rigorous academic instruction for all students, while preparing them for future success.

Schools should develop long-range plans to integrate technology into academic curriculum and have a technology resource person to assist the faculty and students.

Schools should implement tried and true research-based practices and provide teachers with meaningful professional development. Teachers should be evaluated for content knowledge and awarded for professional development through salary increases and professional recognition.

High schools, higher education and employers could work together to develop a plan that clearly spells out the academic skills high school students should learn.

Students should spend more time on academic achievement and less time on extracurricular activities and at jobs that compete for their time.

People who agree say…

We are cheating our young people out of a strong economic future in this global economy if our academic standards continue to lag behind the rest of the world.

High school coursework must be challenging and related to real life experiences in order to raise the academic standards and to keep students motivated.

Students have to be at the top of their game and in many cases have to be able to play a whole new game, one that will require new skills. They have to be equipped to handle technology and teachers have to be equipped to help students meet high expectations.

If we are going to expect high academic achievement, then we cannot move students along to the next level unless they master the competencies.

School should be the primary work of students.

People who disagree say…

This approach fails to recognize the importance of involving the community in the student's education and the need for students to feel connected to their community.

It is fine to have high expectations for all students, but there must be some leeway to recognize that each student has unique learning needs and interests. Not everyone will learn the same way and the same pace, nor does everyone need to learn the same content. We need to honor a variety of talents and skills.

Students need opportunities to learn how to get along with fellow students and with adults. "Get along" skills are just as important academic skills.

Education is not limited to the classroom. Outside experiences like work are educational experiences and should be recognized.

The gap between high school and higher education and the workplace cannot be solved just by higher academic performance. Students need other skills to help them make the transition.

Approach 1: Questions to stimulate your thinking

What might be some other actions that are consistent with this approach?

If we were going to move in this direction, what kind of caution would you give?

What guarantee would you need to have in order to support this approach?

What aspects of this approach do you find troubling?

XXX

What would this approach look like in your community? in communities very different from yours? Across Iowa?

What aspect of this approach seems to make the most sense to you? What part of it appeals to you?

What might be a negative outcome of this approach?

Approach 2: Meet Needs; Make Connections

In July of 2000, students from four states including Iowa developed recommendations to improve the education experience. The number one recommendation was to "recognize that each student is unique and that the 'cookie cutter' approach to education does not accommodate the needs of *all* students." In particular, the students asked for teachers who understand the both the educational and social needs of all students. Some Iowans expressed concern that the high proportion of minorities who drop out indicates that their needs in particular are not being met. Comprising a mere 7.6% of the enrollment, minority students account for 16.5% of the dropouts.

Supporters are concerned that students do not feel connected to their teachers, classmates or community and that too many kids are not getting their basic physical or educational needs met. When young people do not feel like anyone cares, they do not feel motivated to learn. Many young people experience bullying, intimidation and alienation. Iowans expressed concern that young people today are not learning respect for others. In order for students to be prepared for the future, high school must become a place where they can feel welcomed and respected, and learn to offer the same in return.

From this perspective, the best way to prepare young people for the future is to accommodate multiple approaches to learning and teaching, to connect kids with meaningful work through service learning, and to help young people learn to get along and find strength in differences.

What could be done?

Schools should reduce the number of students per teacher and teachers should focus on the student as an individual. Young people could have a personal adult advocate and schools could partner with counselors to provide on-site services.

Each student should have an individual learning plan and curriculum should be student-centered rather than subject-centered. Students should have a stronger say in their learning and be involved in evaluating teacher performance.

Teachers should teach students to respect and honor differences. Student and teachers should confront intolerance and bigotry, and learn to mediate these conflicts.

Students and community members could work together on meaningful service learning projects that connect classroom instruction with real life application. Community projects help young people learn citizenship skills and to become active members of their community.

People who agree say…

Young people need to encounter adults who care about them. They need to have tolerance and acceptance modeled for them.

Young people are going to have to learn to work together and to get along with diverse cultures and ideas. This is the backbone of our democracy and high school is the last opportunity to instill these values in youth.

Young people have many challenges that can get in the way of learning. High school is too important to let personal problems get in the way of the kind of education that will determine their future. We have to act to help each individual realize his or her own potential.

In a global economy and a country with growing diversity, young people who understand and can work with diverse cultures will have an advantage over kids who just know facts and figures.

Young people learn in different ways and are motivated by different things. If we do not cater to these different styles and needs, we may lose some of our most creative thinkers.

People who disagree say…

Too much focus on individual learning styles and content compromises the value of a shared educational experience.

Some of the best teachers may be the toughest on the students. Students are not in the best position to evaluate teachers because they may not realize what an important influence that teacher was until later in life.

Schools need to focus on the core mission of helping students to gain knowledge and access to information that will enable them to succeed in the job market or at a higher education institution.

This approach puts too much responsibility on the school to raise kids. Respect and "get along" skills should be taught in the home. Schools should focus on academic skills.

Increased interaction between the services of the community and the school are a good first step, but an uncertain future demands bold, structural changes in how education is delivered to high school age students.

Approach 2: Questions to stimulate your thinking

What might be some other actions that are consistent with this approach?

If we were going to move in this direction, what kind of caution would you give?

What guarantee would you need to have in order to support this approach?

What aspects of this approach do you find troubling?

What would this approach look like in your community? in communities very different from yours? across Iowa?

What aspect of this approach seems to make the most sense to you? What part of it appeals to you?

What might be a negative outcome of this approach?

This approach says that it is time to rethink the fundamental structure of high schools. The rate of change we are experiencing is unprecedented and the old model or system cannot adapt rapidly enough to these changes. Schools need to be seamless, flexible, student-centered, virtual, and geographically open. Supporters of this approach say that the paradigm of 180 days per school year, 50 minutes per class, is out of sync with the world today. Furthermore, supporters feel that it is faulty to assume that school is the only place where learning takes place. We must find ways to capitalize on and give credit for the student's learning experiences outside of the classroom.

Several forces that make it possible to significantly re-think how education is delivered include increased mobility of the students, the untapped resources of the community, and the potential for technology, particularly the internet, as a tool for delivering instruction. In addition, supporters of this approach are concerned about the unequal distribution of resources and envision new models that will provide greater opportunities to students in communities with limited resources. From this perspective, bold thinking and imagination are required to prepare students for the future.

Schools must strengthen leadership and distribute responsibility beyond the school walls. As the pivotal position in reform, the principal must have a clear educational vision, and be able to lead and manage change. Teachers should be encouraged to take risks to meet the needs of students and to collaborate with community members to identify sources of support as needed. Leadership among students, parents, and others in the school community should be shared.

What could be done?

Parents, students, teachers and administrators could restructure schedules so that students and teachers have more extended time together each day and maybe even operate schools year around.

High schools, businesses and universities could develop criteria for graduation and let students move on based on performance, NOT on time in school. Schools should abandon or revise the Carnegie unit so that learning is not simply equated with seat time.

The schools and community residents could work together to create a variety of learning experiences relevant to the student and to community needs. The community could be fully involved in educating young people. Students could also receive significant amounts of experience using technology, such as the Internet.

The state and school districts could streamline the operations of schools and school districts and change the decision-making structure to allow for rapid responses and local control.

People who agree say…

Schools need to be able to change as quickly as the rest of the world or else our young people will only be prepared for the world of yesterday.

Research is based on what worked in the past, not what is needed in the future. We cannot be bound by what has worked in the past. We need to be forward thinking and anticipate what will be expected of young people in the future.

The Internet offers new ways of learning and ways for us to extend the resources of larger high schools to students in remote parts of the state.

Technology can link students from different parts of the state to each other and to a community beyond their own geographic region so that students can get a global education.

Too many resources in the community are not fully utilized by teachers and students because bureaucratic systems get in the way. Furthermore, the bureaucracy shuts members of the community out of the decision-making process.

People who disagree say…

We cannot afford to gamble with our young people. We know what works, why would we take a chance on new ideas that might not work? Mistakes made now could be harmful to our children's future.

Technology is a poor substitute for human interaction. It is not the panacea that many people think. The single most important influence in a young person's life is a caring adult.

It is unrealistic to think that the community will step up to the plate. People are leading busy lives. This is the reason that we hire school administrators and teachers in the first place.

Education should be left to the experts. Just because someone has a skill doesn't mean that they can teach it. This approach could result in lower standards and lower quality of education.

This approach proposes too many changes too fast and could result in chaos at a time when young people need to be learning discipline and structure.

Approach 3: Questions to stimulate your thinking

What might be some other actions that are consistent with this approach?

If we were going to move in this direction, what kind of caution would you give?

What guarantee would you need to have in order to support this approach?

What aspects of this approach do you find troubling?

What would this approach look like in your community? in communities very different from yours? Across Iowa?

What aspect of this approach seems to make the most sense to you? What part of it appeals to you?

What might be a negative outcome of this approach?

Reflections

I.   Individual Reflections

What new insights do you have about this issue? Has your thinking about the issue changed?

How has your thinking about other people's views changed?

II.   Group Reflections

   Is there a shared sense of direction or common ground for action?

   What are the areas of disagreement about this issue?

   What are the trade-offs that the group is willing to make, or not willing to make?

III.   Next Step Reflections

   What do we still need to talk about?

   How can we use what we have learned in this forum?

   What might you do personally as a result of this forum? What might you do together? Who else needs to be involved?

IV.   Imagine the Future

   If you could design the future Iowa high school, what characteristics would you want to see?

Building Self-Assessment

Assessment Rubric for the Five Characteristics of Effective High Schools

1	This element does not exist
2	Some aspects of this element exist, but it is not systemic
3	Our school has developed a strategy to address this critical element, and we have made substantial progress towards implementation
4	This is a systemic element for our school and we continually adjust the implementation plan to improve its impact on quality learning

Please review the Successful Strategies as you complete the rubric.

Critical Element	**Characteristic A:** Students have deep and supportive relationships with adults over sustained periods of time.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
A.1	Students have adults they can talk to about academics and view adults as consistent and fair				
A.2	Students view school staff as consistent and fair				
A.3	Students believe that school staff care deeply about them-more than just how the student performs in one classroom activity				

Successful Strategies For Characteristic A
a. Lower student/adult ratios especially during instructional times: no clear messages about optimal ratios; small decreases in ratios (e.g., 28:1-25:1) made no difference; dramatic decreases (e.g., 15:1) have made a difference. b. Longer instructional periods for example 1 to 2 hours with same teacher utilizing innovative instructional strategies. c. Alternative scheduling (e.g., block scheduling, seminar courses, independent studies, cooperative learning) d. Reduce the number of classes taught by a teacher over the semester or year e. Group one teacher with a larger number of students to allow smaller groups of students with other teachers. f. Rearrange staff positions, bringing in administrators and support staff g. Group small teams of teachers with the same students over a number of years. h. Smaller high schools: literature tends to identify 1,200-1,500 as the average number of students in a high school; some identify anything over 1,000 as a large high school. Most suggest the optimum size as 500-600, but some go as small as 200. i. Involvement of parents, employers and other community members in the school (e.g., advisor/mentor program)

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*Please review the Successful Strategies as you complete the rubric.

Critical Element	**Characteristic B:** Students have enriched opportunities to learn, perform, and be recognized.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
B.1	Climate is welcoming and inclusive.				
B.2	Schoolwork is relevant to present and future life.				
B.3	Differing learner needs are met through flexible and varied instructional strategies.				
B.4	Students are involved in and benefit from a variety of co-curricular and extracurricular activities.				
B.5	There are formal and informal ways for all students to:				
B.6	Collaborate, be leaders, have work recognized, demonstrate their uniqueness, and contribute to school and community.				

Successful Strategies
a. Common core of activities (academic and nonacademic)
b. Heterogeneous grouping (abilities, races, and SES)
c. Peer mentoring, mediation, peer tutoring
d. Teacher instructional skills
e. Reduction in number of students that any one student interacts with on a daily basis (e.g., small learning communities)
f. Use of technology.
g. Experiential learning, out-of-class connections, real-life activities, solve real-world problems.
h. Career-oriented programs (e.g., career awareness, exploration, and counseling activities, curriculum aligned with career paths, technical based programs)
i. Alternative courses (e.g., independent studies, learning labs, leadership wilderness courses, cultural enrichment courses)
j. Use of sites other than the school for instruction.
k. Virtual high schools.
l. Infused a multi-cultural perspective into educational programming.
m. Student advisory groups, tutorial settings, honor councils, one-on-one meetings with staff, student forums.
n. Non-traditional time schedule-offering afternoon or evening programs

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Please review the Successful Strategies as you complete the rubric.

Critical Element	**Characteristic C:** All efforts are focused on a clear, powerful educational agenda.	1	2	3	4
C.1	High academic expectations are clearly communicated for each student.				
C.2	Students' educational experiences focus on outcomes beyond the diploma.				
C.3	Curricula are clearly delineated and focused.				

Successful Strategies

a. Existence of content standards and student benchmarks: clear agreement in the literature on the need to link standards and benchmarks at all levels of the curriculum; the literature differs on the benefits of a broad array of standards and benchmarks over a few, "in-depth" standards and benchmarks

b. Common core focused on high-level academic activity

c. Academic expectations are regularly communicated to, understood, supported, and followed by students, staff and parents.

d. Systems for monitoring student progress

e. Clear methods for identification of students at risk of low achievement and methods for engaging them in the curriculum.

f. Authentic assessment

g. Ongoing examination and evaluation of practices

h. School goals are shared across "departments" and directly tie to the school purpose

i. Credit given for actual learning, rather than "seat time"

j. Alternative graduation requirements (e.g., performance portfolios, community service hours)

k. Alteration (or elimination) of the Carnegie unit

Assessment Rubric for the Five Characteristics of Effective High Schools

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4	This is a systemic element for our school and we continually adjust the implementation plan to improve its impact on quality learning

*Please review the Successful Strategies as you complete the rubric.

Critical Element	**Characteristic D:** Students, staff, parents and community share responsibility for student success.	1	2	3	4
D.1	Students believe they have responsibility for their own success or failure.				
D.2	Teachers believe they have responsibility for the success or failure of their students.				
D.3	Parents are engaged in and take responsibility for their student's education.				
D.4	Teachers are highly knowledgeable, apply affective and innovative learning strategies, and operate in a positive, professionally orientated community.				
D.5	District and school administrators work with the community to provide the necessary support and resources for effective teaching (including time, materials, physical space, staffing and funds).				
D.6	The community believes they have the responsibility to provide support and resources to the district and administrators to assure student success.				

Successful Strategies
a. Teams of teachers plan, evaluate, and revise programs and curriculums (both departmental and cross-departmental)
b. Peer assessment and coaching
c. Teachers involved in making decisions about their daily work and broader school issues (e.g., site-based councils, teacher leaders, school improvement committees)
d. Traditional schedules altered to provided staff time to work together (during school hours and other blocks of time)
e. Multiple opportunities for professional development and improvement that are aligned with individual teacher needs and overall school goals. Should be ongoing and include feedback and follow-up evaluations. Using multiple professional development strategies.
f. Reflective dialogue study groups
g. Decreased teacher load
h. Common work spaces
i. Use of support staff, volunteers and others to cover classes and create release time.
j. Parent groups, homework, post-school expectations & planning
k. Teachers, staff, parents, students, and community engaged in conversation about the purpose of education

Assessment Rubric for the Five Characteristics of Effective High Schools

1	This element does not exist
2	Some aspects of this element exist, but it is not systemic
3	Our school has developed a strategy to address this critical element, and we have made substantial progress towards implementation
4	This is a systemic element for our school and we continually adjust the implementation plan to improve its impact on quality learning

Please review the Successful Strategies as you complete the rubric.

Critical Element	**Characteristic E:** School is engaged in dynamic, continuous improvement that is student focused.	1	2	3	4
E.1	School leadership understands and models that education is dynamic and must be responsive to changes in the local, state, and national communities				
E.2	Effective partnerships exist with entities outside of the school for the purpose of continuous improvement.				
E.3	School regularly review's its goals, measures its effectiveness, and makes appropriate modifications to improve student success.				
E.4	The school climate encourages risk taking and innovation.				

Successful Strategies
a. Established systemic, systematic processes such as evolutionary planning, collaborative improvement procedures, continuous monitoring, and problem solving processes.
b. Implemented modifications such as organization of the school day and year, student groupings, departmental structures, curricular organization, credit options.
c. Action-based research
d. Innovative configuration mapping